

interzone

JUNE 2000

NUMBER 156

£3.00

Peter F. Hamilton 'The Suspect Genome'

plus an interview with
Harlan Ellison

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST • JEAN-CLAUDE DUNYACH • YVONNE NAVARRO



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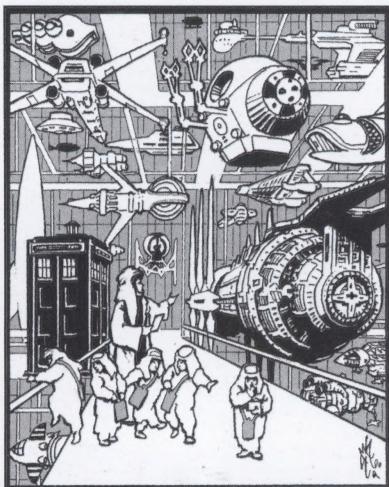
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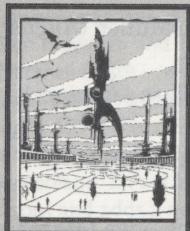
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science fiction & fantasy

JUNE 2000

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Cover by Dominic Harman for "The Suspect Genome"

Published monthly. All material is © *Interzone*, 2000, on behalf of the various contributors

ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

Trade distribution: Diamond Magazine Distribution Ltd.,
Unit 7, Rother Ironworks, Fishmarket Road, Rye,
East Sussex TN31 7LR (tel. 01797 225229).

Bookshop distribution: Central Books,
99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN (tel. 020 8986 4854).

Dear Editors:

The opportunity to kill two birds with one stone has proven too much to resist, so I'd like to make some comments about the letters by Adrian Fry and S. Higgins in *Interzone* 154 – and if an easy link seems unlikely, bear with me.

I share Mr Fry's scepticism about the ability of technology to deliver a better world and fear that Bruce Sterling and other thinkers about our "digital future" have fallen for the hype. More technology and more "freedom" for markets simply is not the answer to the great majority of the problems which face both the developed and the developing world.

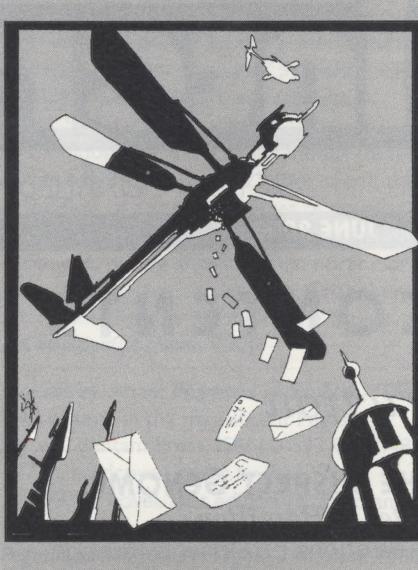
California, home of the digerati, is a perfect example. The happy folk of stock-rich Silicon Valley are within spitting distance of vast numbers of (predominantly Hispanic and black) people without significant cultural or financial capital. If anyone needed proof that "trickle down" economics doesn't work, look to Los Angeles. That the likes of Sterling so consistently miss or dismiss the enormity of the divisions which exist at the heart of the fledgling "digital republic" suggests that either they don't care or that they are deluding themselves.

And yet I can't bring myself to agree with Mr Fry's dismal world view. Of course there are social divisions, but just as there is no justification in assuming that technology alone will make the world better, there is no reason to believe that, alone, it will make things worse. By most measures we are living in a world which is more wealthy, more healthy, more free and more safe than at any time in the past. That we face challenges is undeniable, that they are insurmountable far from proven.

As citizens of nations that are both relatively free and rich we have a duty to ourselves and to the future to ensure that we create a social order that is both humane and fair. That task will be difficult (perhaps impossible) but Mr Fry's nihilism is wrong. We must at least try.

Which brings me, the long way round, to S. Higgins's letter. As someone who works (in a small way) in design I strongly dislike the use of sans fonts as body text. There is something profoundly elitist in the way in which designers have chosen to use fonts that exclude the reader by making the text more difficult to understand. That modernity (or even futurity) are used as justifications for a decision which puts form above content only increases my concern, for it brings to mind some of the worst ideologies of the last century.

In documents that aspire to engage the majority (as in societies) the first



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goal should be the widest possible degrees of accessibility and inclusion. So, while there are a number of things I'd change about *Interzone* (more imagination in the artwork and fewer nipples on the covers?) at least as far as the types of font used you aren't just getting it right – you're being democratic as well. (Although there are serif fonts more interesting than Schoolbook.)

Martin McGrath

Harlow, Essex

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Dear Editors:

This month's cover art work, the one with the naked ladies on, for Richard Calder's "Lord Soho" (*Interzone* 154), was my least favourite of all time. Calder's stories all seem to have pictures of grotesque ladies in various states of undress... I can't leave that kind of material on my desk at work! Most of the 1999 cover artwork was very good, though, and I would be quite happy with continuing in that vein.

Here is my list of stories, from favourite at the top to least favourite. If I remembered reading a story, it made it into this list. If I didn't remember it, either it was unremarkable, or I didn't enjoy it, or I didn't read it.

Really enjoyed:

"Dream Blue Murder"

Dominic Green (*July*)

"Shaping Up"

Helen Patrice (*November*)

"Three-Legged Dog"

Ian Watson (*May*)

Enjoyed:

"Teddy Cat"

Catherine McMullen (*August*)

"The Mirror Repair'd"

Alexander Glass (*January*)

"Soldier.exe"

Tony Ballantyne (*June*)

"Freckled Figure"

Hiroe Suga (*March*)

"Alien TV" by Paul J. McAuley (*April*)

"Gorillagram"

Tony Ballantyne (*January*)

"Molly and the Angel"

Francis Amery (*July*)

Just remembered:

"Feet of God"

Rudy Kremberg (*March*)

"Ghost"

Darrell Schweitzer (*January*)

The flying saucer one in August

I generally don't like stories written in a Victorian style, and set in Victorian times; in my view the author is wasting useful writing energy with an ineffective device. Naturally, this is purely my own opinion. Give me present, near future or far future anytime. I think that near future is the hardest to pull off plausibly...

Martin L. V. Jenkins

Bristol

Dear Editors:

Paul J. McAuley's "Naming the Dead" (#149) gets my first choice vote in this year's poll, with floating votes for Eric Brown's "Hunting the Slarque" (#141) and Tanith Lee's "Where Does the Town Go at Night?" (#147).

Who should lose their deposit? There were a fair few dull stories (Robert N. Stephenson's "The Little Ones" #146 and Christopher Kenworthy's "The Rot" #147 spring to mind) and stories that were hardly stories at all (Paul Park's "Bukavo Dreams" #149 and Kate Orman's "The Bicycle Net" #146, for example – both very well written, but completely lacking anything even resembling narrative drive) but at the end of the day, in the final analysis, I would choose to cast my negative votes for Brian Stableford ("The Gateway to Eternity", #139-140) and Kim Newman ("Just like Eddy", #148, and "Angel Down, Sussex," #149) as Authors Who Should Know Better.

As for the non-fiction... well, I could quite happily never again see two authors who write together interviewing each other, but other than that, I have to say that, while I like reading the reviews, they're not what I buy the magazine for, and if you were to announce that you were dropping the reviews in favour of an extra story a

month, I, for one, wouldn't lose any sleep over it.

Jamie Barras

jbarras@ch.kcl.ac.uk

Dear Editors:

Re the *Interzone* 1999 popularity poll, in issues 139 to 150 I particularly liked these stories:

"Angelmakers"

Paul Di Filippo (*March*)

"The Volvax Immersion"

Tom Arden (*May*)

"Where Does the Town Go at Night?"

Tanith Lee (*September*)

"Angel Down, Sussex"

Kim Newman (*November*)

I particularly disliked only one story:

"Bukavu Dreams"

Paul Park (*November*)

There were no stories truly outstanding in 1999, in my opinion. In fact my five favourites from 1998 all scored higher than any in 1999, though this doesn't necessarily mean that the overall standard has dropped. I enjoyed the special Australian August issue, but I think one guest-edited issue per year is enough.

The quality and quantity of the reviews remains high, and I'm glad to see more reviews of audio appearing in *Interzone*. I'd still like to see magazines reviewed more often.

The artwork in *IZ* often appears to be no more than a filler to break up the text, and the proliferation of Dominic Harman's art (especially on the cover) tends to tedium: he seems to have only one style. Good though he is, aren't there any other artists out there?

Fiction, however, is where *IZ*'s main strength lies, and is why I subscribe. I hope that *fiction* is where the editorial mind will be concentrating in the 21st century.

Paul S. Jenkins

Portsmouth

Dear Editors:

Here is a list of the stories that I particularly liked in last year's issues:

"A Victorian Ghost Story"

Kim Newman

"White Dog"

Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff

"Naming The Dead"

Paul J. McAuley

"Freckled Figure"

Hiroe Suga

"The Volvax Immersion"

Tom Arden

The only story I particularly disliked

was "The Woman Who Saved The World" by Jamie Barras.

I have participated in the *Interzone* polls for the last five years and I was surprised by how few standout stories I had noted this time. Similarly, there is the lone story I disliked. I hope that this demonstrates how effective your polls are at influencing the stories that are purchased. Looking back over the last twelve issues, my general feeling is one of happiness with the quality of the entertainment. However, there remains the nagging doubt that somehow the process of purchasing is now biased towards a contented middle ground, rather than risking to be controversial.

Dave Smith

david-k-smith@lineone.net

Dear Editors:

Ten of the Best from *Interzone* for 1999:

Paul Di Filippo, "Angelmakers"

Ian Watson, "Three-Legged Dog"

Richard Calder, "Malignos"

Alastair Reynolds, "Galactic North"

Francis Amery, "Molly & the Angel"

Richard A. Lupoff, "31.12.99"

Francis Amery,

"Molly & the Men in Black"

Greg Egan, "Border Guards"

Robert Reed, "At the Corner of Darwin & Eternity"

Helen Patrice, "Shaping Up"

Put a gun to my head and I'd probably pick "Angelmakers" as the most memorable, though if you put all three of Amery's "Molly" stories together they'd take some beating.

Nice to see Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff, Alexander Glass, Tony Ballantyne and Nicholas Waller building on the good impressions they made in 1998, and Gary Westfahl is always entertaining.

Alasdair Montgomery

*Library and Information Services
University of Wales, Swansea*

Editor: Thanks to everybody for their story votes. Given Alasdair Montgomery's remarks about the "Molly" stories, immediately above, perhaps this is the place to announce that Francis Amery's three stories about the fantastic adventures of his down-and-out heroine Molly are due to reappear this summer, together with several more in a similar vein, in the book *Year Zero* by Brian Stableford (yes, for those who did not already know, "Francis Amery" is a pseudonym of Stableford's). The finished story-sequence, which we recommend to all those who enjoyed the first three pieces in *Interzone*, is being published by Sarob Press ("Brynderwen," 41 Forest View, Mountain Ash, Wales CF45 3DU – e-mail: sarobpress@hotmail.com). Sarob Press has also contracted to publish *Parallax View*, the volume of collaborative stories by Keith Brooke and Eric Brown (most of which first appeared in *Interzone*) which was announced for last year but was orphaned when its original intended publisher ceased trading. All strength to Sarob's elbow for picking up on these interesting books.

Letters for publication should be e-mailed to interzone@cix.co.uk – or sent by conventional post to our editorial address (shown on the contents page). Please note that we reserve the right to shorten letters.

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It was only quarter past nine on that particular Monday morning, but the September sun was already hot enough to soften the tarmac of Oakham's roads. The broad deep-tread tyres of Richard Townsend's Mercedes were unaffected by the mildly adhesive quality of the surface, producing a sly purring sound as they crossed the spongy black surface.

Radio Rutland played as he drove. The station was still excited by the news about Byrne Tyler – the celebrity's death was the biggest thing to happen in the area all month. A newscaster was interviewing some detective about the lack of an arrest. The body had been found on Friday, and the police still had nothing.

Richard turned onto the High Street, and the road surface improved noticeably. The heart of the town was thriving again. Local shops were competing with the national brand-name stores that were muscling in on the central real estate, multiplying in the wake of the economic good times that had come to the town. Richard always regretted not having any interests in the new consumerism rush, but he'd been just too late to leap on that gravy train. Real money had been very short in the immediate aftermath of the PSP years, which was when the retail sector began its revival.

He drove into the Pillings Industrial Precinct, an area of small factories and warehouses at the outskirts of the town. Trim allotments down the right hand side of the road were planted with thick banana trees, their clumps of green fruit waving gently in the muggy breeze. The sturdy trunks came to a halt beside a sagging weed-webbed fence that sketched out a jumble of derelict land. All that remained of the factory that once stood there was a litter of shattered bricks and broken concrete footings half glimpsed among the tangle of nettles and rampant vines. A new sign had been pounded into the iron-hard ochre clay, proclaiming it to be Zone 7, and Ready For Renewal, a Rutland Council/Townsend Properties partnership.

Zone 7 was an embarrassment. It was the first site anyone saw when they entered the Pillings Precinct: a ramshackle remnant of the bad old days. The irony being Pillings was actually becoming quite a success story. Most of the original units, 20th-century factories and builders' merchants, had been refurbished to house viable new businesses, while the contemporary zones, expanding out into the verdant cacao plantations that encircled the town, were sprouting the uniform blank sugar-cube structures of 21st-century construction. Seamless weather-resistant composite walls studded with mushroom-like air-conditioning vents, and jet-black solar-cell roofs. Whatever industry was conducted inside, it was securely masked by the standardized multi-purpose facades. Even Richard wasn't sure what some of the companies did.

He parked the Merc outside his own offices, a small brick building recently renovated. Colm, his assistant, was already inside, going through the datapackages that had accumulated overnight on his desktop terminal.

"The architect for Zone 31 wants you to visit," he said as Richard walked in. "There's some problem with the floor reinforcements. And a Mr Alan O'Hagen would like to see you. He suggested 10.30 this morning."

Richard paused. "Do I know him?"

Colm consulted his terminal. "We don't have any file on record. He said he may be interested in a zone."

"Ah." Richard smiled. "Fine, 10.30."

It was a typical morning spent juggling data. Builders, suppliers, clients, accountants, local planning officials; they all expected him to clear up the mess they were making of their own jobs. He'd spent a lot of his own money over the last four years, schmoozing and paying off the county and town councillors to get his partnership with the precinct project, and it had paid off. Townsend Properties was currently involved in developing eight of the zones, with architects working on plans for another three. Having the massive Event Horizon corporation open a memox processing facility on Zone 12 a year ago had been a real triumph for the town; other smaller corporations had immediately begun to nose around, eager for sub-contracts. Quite how the council development officers managed to pull off that coup always baffled Richard. He'd never known a supposedly professional team quite as incompetent as the people who worked at Rutland Council. Every job he undertook was besieged by official delays and endless obstructionist revisions.

The man who walked in at 10.30 prompt wasn't quite what Richard had expected. He was in his late 50s, nothing like any of those eager young business types who normally came sniffing round the precinct. Alan O'Hagen wore a grey business suit with a pale purple tie. He had a sense of authority which made Richard automatically straighten up in his chair and reach to adjust his own tie. Even the man's handshake was carefully controlled, an impression of strength held in reserve.

"What can I do for you?" Richard asked as his visitor settled into the leather chair before the desk.

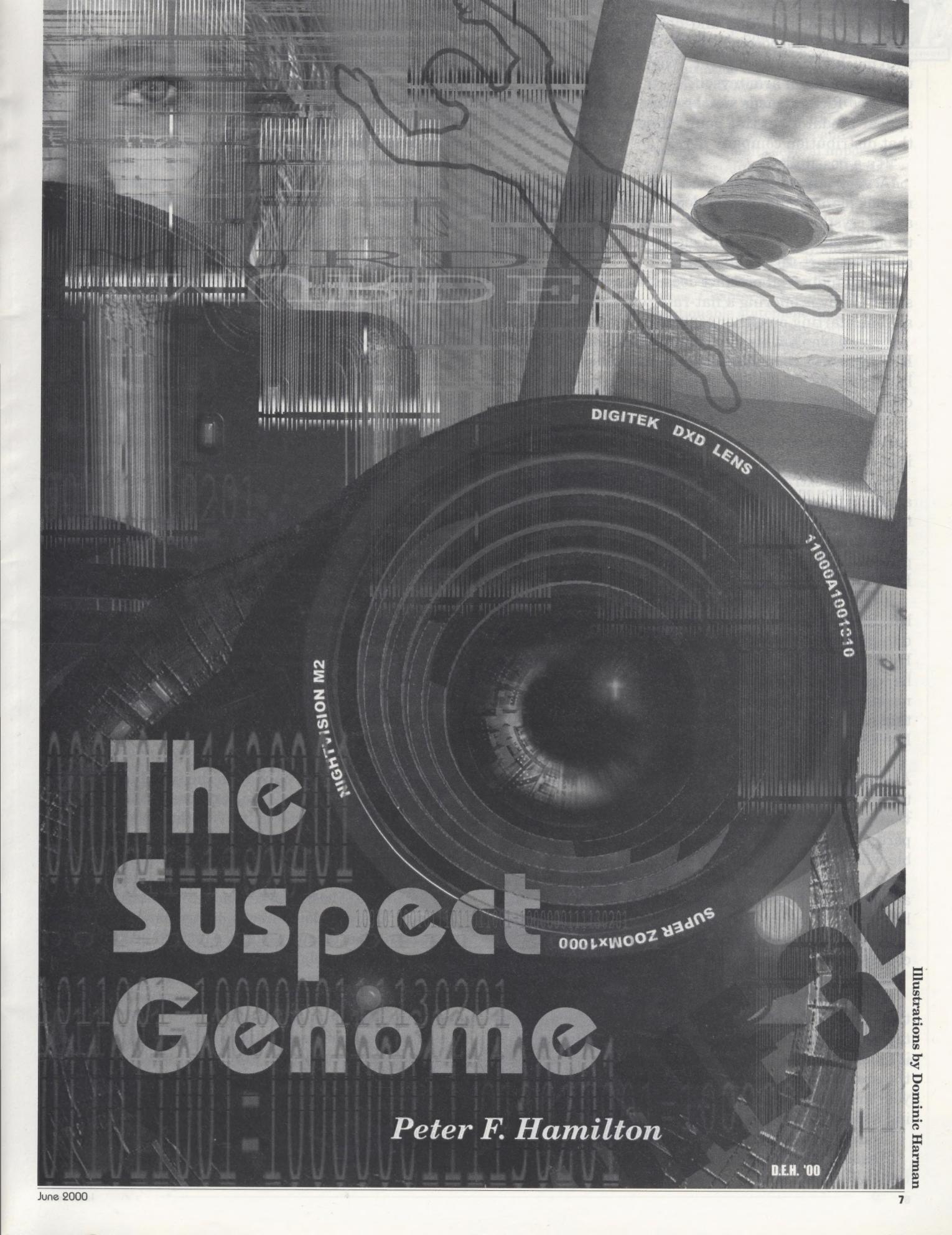
"My company." Alan O'Hagen held up a silver palmtop cybofax. Its key blinked with a tiny pink light as it squirted a datapackage into the desktop terminal. Richard scanned the information quickly.

"Firedrake Marketing? I'm afraid I've never heard of it."

O'Hagen smiled. "No reason you should. It's a small virtual company I own. I trade on-circuit, specializing in albums and multimedia drama games. I have some German software houses signed up, and a couple of African jazz bands who aren't well distributed in Europe. Naturally, I'd like to rectify that."

"Uh huh." Richard made an immediate guess about what kind of German software – the end of the PSP hadn't seen a total reversal of censorship in England. "So how does the Pillings Precinct fit in with all this?"

"I want Firedrake to become more than a virtual company. At the moment it consists of a circuit site with a



The Suspect Genome

Peter F. Hamilton

D.E.H. '00

few trial samples you can access, and an order form. I subcontract distribution and delivery to a mail-order company in Peterborough. After their fees, I'm not left with much in the way of profit. What I want to do is build up a distribution arm myself."

"I see." Richard made sure he wasn't grinning. It would appear predatory at this point. "And you'd like to build that distribution company here."

"It's a possibility."

"A very advantageous one for you. Event Horizon's memox plant would be next door, so there'd be no shortage of crystals, and we do have an excellent rail service to both Peterborough and Leicester. Not to mention a generous start-up tax allowance."

"Every industrial precinct does, these days," O'Hagen said. "Corby is offering a flat-rate construction loan for anyone starting on either of their new precincts."

Richard blanched his irritation at the mention of Corby. He'd lost three clients to their precinct developers in the last six weeks. "You'll find us a competitive match for any other precinct, I assure you."

"What about construction times?"

"That depends on the size of the operation you're looking for, of course."

"Nothing extravagant to start with, but I will require a zone with considerable potential for expansion if things take off."

"As I'm sure they will." Richard walked over to the precinct map pinned on the wall. "I have several zones I can offer you."

It took another two hours of cajoling before O'Hagen left. Richard had squirted just about every brochure and datapackage he'd got into the businessman's cybofax. He'd hate to play the man at poker; no hint of how keen he was had leaked from that impassive face. But the good news was that O'Hagen had invited Richard for dinner that night, suggesting the Lord Nelson restaurant in the Market Square.

After lunch, Richard drove to the courthouse in the town's old castle hall. Jodie Dobson, his solicitor, was waiting for him in the car park. In her mid-30s, a junior partner in one of the local firms, she was more than capable when it came to corporate legal matters.

"We've got plenty of time," she said, gesturing to the ancient doors. "The land-registry clerk's only just finished his lunch."

"Fine." He paused. "I don't suppose you've heard of a company called Firedrake?"

"Should I have?"

"Not really." He waved his cybofax. "I was checking their site this lunchtime. They sell a response formulator for interactives. Once you've plugged into a drama, it'll take your character wherever you want to go inside the arena. The plotlines will reconfigure to incorporate your movements and speech into the story. They're claiming a much better reaction time than other software."

"Sounds fairly standard to me."

"Yes, but it's not just for flatscreens, it can handle a total VR immersion. It's fully compatible with all the

major multimedia formats; you can supplement it to whatever drama you buy."

"Why the interest?"

He shrugged and gestured her through the doorway. "I think it could be quite successful."

The old stone hall had a vaulted ceiling, and white-washed plaster walls hung with hundreds of horseshoes. Prior to the Warming the hall had been little more than a historical tourist attraction, used only occasionally for a magistrate's court. Then in the aftermath of the seas flooding the Lincolnshire fens, the vast influx of refugees had more than doubled Rutland's population. The hall's legal activities had expanded to become full-time. Modern partitioning had been used to break up the rear of the hall into small office cubicles. Jodie and Richard manoeuvred along a narrow corridor between the transparent sound-proofed walls. The Land Registry & Claims cubicle was barely large enough to hold the two of them as well as the clerk.

Jodie had the petition already prepared, and handed over the two memox crystals detailing the case, including the original farmer's title to the land. Richard, as the claimee, had to sign a host of papers verifying the action.

"Any idea when the case will be heard?" he asked.

"I'm sorry, Mr Townsend." The clerk's hand fluttered over the pile of memox crystals and paper folders on his desk. "We have over 800 ownership cases filed in this court alone. The local PSP Land Rights allocation committee confiscated a lot of property."

"Yes, I appreciate that, but this is land for a commercial venture which will benefit many people in the town. It'll create jobs, and bring wealth into the area. Surely that warrants some additional attention."

"I would say yes," the clerk murmured diplomatically. "But it's not up to me."

"Nevertheless... I'd be grateful if you could point this out to the powers that be."

"I'll do what I can."

When they were back outside in the scorching sunlight Jodie frowned. "That was sailing close to the wind. You don't do backroom deals in a civic office."

"I'll bear it in mind. And you should remember that we need that leisure complex; your partnership will scoop up a big fee for steering it through the legal stages."

"I am aware of basic marketplace economics, thank you."

"Good. There's a lot of new industry moving into town right now. That means wealthy educated people looking for somewhere to relax, and prepared to pay for the privilege. Rutland Water is a fabulous commercial resource, which is tragically underused. Can you believe there's only three hotels on the shore?"

Jodie nudged him softly. He looked round to see a bicycle entering the castle hall grounds. It was Andy Broady peddling heavily, his ruddy young face glistening with sweat. Richard almost laughed out loud. Even in this weather the kibbutzniks still wore their thick dark dungarees.

Andy dismounted and leant the bike against a wall. It was an ancient contraption of black steel tubes, with a

wicker basket on the front of broad handlebars. The County Museum would be proud to possess a specimen like it.

Richard gave him a pleasant nod. Andy glared back furiously. For a moment Richard thought he might stalk over and swing a punch. Eventually, he pulled a bundle of papers out of the basket and made for the hall doors.

"My relocation offer stands," Richard said. "There's no need for either of us to go through this. It is my land."

"My father died this morning," Andy said. His voice was close to choking.

"I'm very sorry to hear that," Richard said.

"Accident, my arse!"

Richard kept his voice neutral. "I don't understand."

"Listen, you." Andy took a pace towards them, his finger raised. "Twenty years he worked that land. He kept the faith and taught it to all of us. God rewarded our labours with enough fruit and crops to feed ourselves. It's our home! We won't give it up."

"With all respect to your father, God didn't give you that land. The PSP did. They stole it from a family who were farming it a lot longer than 20 years, and didn't pay a penny in compensation. What kind of justice is that?"

"It's ours!" Andy was close to tears. "I've spent my life there."

Richard nearly said, *Time to move on, then*, but kept his sarcasm in check. It wouldn't do to get involved in a public fracas with some half-wit farm boy. Besides, the oaf was built like a combine harvester – solid power in a huge squat body. They stared at each other for a moment, then Andy hurried inside, rubbing the crucifix stitched to the front of his dungarees.

"Filing their counter claim, no doubt," Jodie said. "They'll appeal for post-acquisition compensation, you know. It's what I'd do in their situation."

"Fat lot of good that'll do them. I have full title."

"You'll have to let me see the plans for this leisure complex sometime. It must be quite something."

"It's a work of art. Most aesthetic."

"You mean, profitable."

He laughed. "What else?"

Alan O'Hagen had booked a table at the back of the Lord Nelson, where they were afforded some privacy. Richard enjoyed the small restaurant; it had tasteful antique decor, efficient service, and an excellent seafood menu. His ex-wife had always badgered him to take her, but he never had the money in those days. Now she was no longer a burden to him with her absurd middle-class a-fair-day's-work-for-a-fair-day's-pay ethic. Nothing worthwhile in this world came fair. The young waitress gave him a respectful smile as he came in. Success was the most succulent dish.

O'Hagen was waiting for him. Richard ordered a bottle of Australian Chardonnay from the wine list, almost the most expensive available. It was unusual for a client to buy him a meal, especially at this stage, and it made him wonder what kind of proposal O'Hagen was going to make.

"I want to take Zone 35," O'Hagen said. "However, I may have one small problem which I was wondering if

you could help me with."

"Go on," Richard said. This was the part he enjoyed the most – the part, different every time, which had to be settled to make it all fall into place.

"The industrial unit will cost about half a million New Sterling to build and equip," O'Hagen said. "Firedrake is a viable concern, but I'm not going to get the capital backing from a bank to build a whole warehouse and mailing outfit from scratch. Not with that to offer as collateral on the deal."

"Firedrake can't be your only concern, surely?"

"It's not. But the kind of imports I've been dealing with in the past don't lend themselves to close examination. Besides, there's none of that money left."

"I see."

O'Hagen leaned over the table. "Look, the thing is this. At the moment Firedrake has a turnover of about 70,000 New Sterling per year. And that's just with one poxy site and not much advertising. Once my distribution arm is up and running I can expand the product range and the advertising. That'll start to generate enough income to pay off the kind of loan I'll need to get it started. I'm *this* close."

"I can see that, but..."

"Every business faces this point in the early years. It's a credibility gap, nothing more. I need the banks to take a favourable look at the proposal, that's all. England's economy is in a high boom stage right now, and it's going to last for a decade at least with this new giga-conductor Event Horizon has delivered. There's so much potential for expansion here, you know that. The banks are desperate for an excuse to invest in our companies."

"But have you got any kind of collateral you can offer the bank? Something concrete? Like you say, they're fairly flexible."

"I have one proposition. It's for you." He leaned in closer. "Become my partner in Firedrake. I'll sell you half of the shares."

"What?"

"It's simple. With your involvement, the bank is bound to approve the loan application. You're an established businessman; your development company is a success. With that kind of finance behind Firedrake, it couldn't fail."

"I'm sorry. It's my job to sell you part of the precinct, not the other way round. I'm not a buyer, Mr O'Hagen."

"I'm not asking you to buy. I'm even prepared to pay you."

Richard carefully poured himself some more Chardonnay. "I don't follow."

"Look, what we're talking about here is credibility, right? I want financial credibility, and that's what I'll pay you for. You take a half share in Firedrake. It's not worth anything, there are only two shares, and they're valued at a pound each. I told you, it's a virtual company. Memory space on a mainframe, that's all. But if you combine its turnover with your company's involvement, we've got a valid application for an expansion loan. And you get another commercial unit built on the precinct, out of which you make a tidy profit. Nor will you be liable for Firedrake if – God forbid – it goes down the tube. The distribution operation will be a subsidiary which I own. There's no risk in it for you."

Richard hesitated. The idea almost made sense, and some of the arrangements he'd made on other deals were a lot less orthodox. "If I take a share in Firedrake, the banks will see what you're doing. That would help your credibility, and it would ruin mine."

"Yes. But if you'd taken that half share two years ago they'd be impressed. It would show that you'd been a part of a promising business for a decent period, and were now confident enough in it to expand."

"Hmm." Richard sat back and looked into that impulsive face. O'Hagen was earnest, but certainly not pleading. "You mentioned payment. What kind of incentive would I have received to loan you my good name for the past two years?"

"I have a painting. It's a McCarthy, worth quite a bit. Not enough to trade in as collateral for a warehouse unit, you understand. But I could loan you that until Firedrake was earning enough to pay you back."

"How much is a bit?"

"Find the right collector, you should be able to get 20,000 for it."

Richard weighed it up. Twenty thousand for using his name and reputation to lever a loan from a bank for a deal in which he would profit. And costing one tiny blemish in record-keeping, a one-pound share and two years. To massage that kind of data you didn't even need to be an accountant... let alone a creative one. "I'd want to see Firedrake's accounts before I go any further," he said cautiously.

For the first time, there was a display of emotion on Alan O'Hagen's face as his lips moved into a small smile. "Come to my office tomorrow. My accountant will go over them with you."

Thistlemore Wood was a district on Peterborough's western sprawl, part of the industrial expansion which had turned the city into a commercial powerhouse in the post-Warming years. To south was an old park, now hosting an estate of hemispherical apartment blocks, silvery crescents rising up out of the grassland. The road Richard eased the Merc along was lined by closely planted maeosopis trees, their long branches curving into an arboreal arch above him. He had to slow on the edge of Thistlemore because a converter crew was at work on the road. Smoke was venting out of their big remoulder vehicle as it chewed up the cinder flecks the track was made from. An endless sheet of smooth thermo-hardened cellulose was extruded from its rear, a dark protective coating which sealed the raw earth away from pounding tyres and searing sunlight. The crew diverted Richard around the vehicle, keeping him off the freshly-laid surface. A couple of rickshaws came the other way, their riders clamping cloths over their noses as the smoke gushed round them.

The block where O'Hagen rented office space for Firedrake was eight stories high, its exterior white marble and copper glass. Satellite uplink antennae squatted on the roof inside their weather domes; an indicator of just how much data traffic the building handled. Richard pulled up in the visitors' car park, then took the lift to the sixth floor.

Firedrake had one employee. Apparently she did everything in the office: personal assistant, receptionist, site

maintenance, made tea and coffee, handled communications. Like O'Hagen, she wasn't what Richard was expecting, but for very different reasons. She was small, though he quickly redefined that as compact. He didn't think she'd take very kindly to people who called her small. Every look was menacing, as if she were eyeing him up for a fight... a physical one. Her dress had short sleeves, showing arms scuffed with what looked like knife scars, and a tattoo: closed fist gripping a thorn cross, blood dripping.

After he'd given his name she reluctantly pressed her intercom button. "Mr Townsend to see you," she growled.

"Thank you, Suzi," O'Hagen answered. "Send him in, please."

Her thumb jabbed at a door. "In there."

Richard went past her and found himself in Alan O'Hagen's office. "That's some secretary you've got there."

"She's cheap," O'Hagen replied with a grin. "She's also surprisingly efficient. And I don't get too many unwanted visitors barging in."

"I can imagine," Richard muttered.

O'Hagen indicated a woman who was standing at the side of his desk. "My accountant, Mrs Jane Adams."

She gave Richard a curt nod. Her appearance was comfortable after the girl outside; she was in her late 40s, dressed in a business suit, with white hair tidied in a neat short style.

"I understand you intend to invest in Firedrake," she said.

"That's what I'm here to decide."

"Very well." She gave O'Hagen a disapproving look. "I'm not sure I should be endorsing this kind of action."

"Jane, neither of us is getting any younger. If Firedrake works out the way we expect we'll have a decent nest-egg to sell to some kombinate or media prince. Hell, even Richard here might buy me out."

"Let's take it one step at a time, shall we," Richard said. "If I could see the accounts."

With one last reluctant look at O'Hagen, Mrs Adams handed Richard a pair of memox crystals. "They're completely up to date," she said.

He put the first crystal into the slot on his cybofax and began scrolling down the columns of figures. O'Hagen had been optimistic rather than honest when he said the company's turnover was 70,000. This year was barely over 60, and the year before scraped in at 50. But it was an upward trend.

"I've already identified several new software products I'd like Firedrake to promote," O'Hagen was saying. "I should be able to sign exclusivity rights for the English market on the back of this expansion project."

"May I see the painting, please?" Richard asked.

"Sure." O'Hagen picked up a slim kelpboard-wrapped package from behind his desk. Richard had been expecting something larger. This was barely 40 centimetres high, 30 wide. He slipped the thin kelpboard from the front. "What is it?" he asked. The painting was mostly sky sliced by a line of white cloud, with the mound of a hill rising out of the lower right corner. Hanging in the air like some bizarre obsidian dagger was an alien space-

ship, or possibly an airborne neolithic monument.

"*View of a Hill and Clouds*," O'Hagen said contentedly. "Remarkable, isn't it? It's from McCarthy's earlier phase, before he moved from oils to refractive sculpting."

"I see." Richard pulled the kelpboard wrapping back on. "I'd like to get it valued."

"Of course." O'Hagen smiled.

Richard took the painting to the Sotheby's office in Stamford on his way back from Thistlemore Wood. The assistant was appreciative when Richard told her he wanted it valued for his house-insurance policy. She took her time, checking its authenticity before giving him an estimate. Eighteen thousand New Sterling. Once again Mr Alan O'Hagen was being financially optimistic. But all things considered, it wasn't a bad price for endorsing the Zone 35 development.

"I think we have an agreement," he told O'Hagen over the phone the next day.

There was a chuckle from the earpiece. "I thought you'd be able to appreciate a good deal. I'll get the paperwork over to you right away."

"Very well. I'll notify the precinct's banking consortium that I have another client."

Suzi turned up mid-afternoon carrying a small leather satchel. She opened it to produce a thin folder. There were two partnership agreement contracts to sign, both dated two years previously; even his signature counter-witness was filled in and dated. Mrs Adams, he noted.

"It says here my partner in Firedrake is Newton Holdings," Richard said.

"Yeah. So?"

"I thought it was held by Mr O'Hagen."

"Newton belongs to him; it does his imports. You want

to call him?"

He couldn't meet her impatient antagonistic stare. "No." He signed the partnership contracts.

"Mr O'Hagen said to say you can owe him the pound for the share," Suzi said. She gathered up one copy of the contract and handed him a share certificate with his name on it: again dated two years ago.

"Tell him that's very generous of him."

She scowled and marched out of the office. Richard glanced over the certificate again, then locked it and the partnership agreement in the wall safe.

Richard was having breakfast the next morning when the police arrived, hammering so hard on the door he thought they were trying to smash it down. He opened the door wearing just his dressing gown, blinking... partly from confusion at the team of eight armed uniformed officers standing on his front lawn, and partly at the bright morning sunlight.

The person knocking aggressively on his paintwork identified herself as Detective Amanda Patterson, holding her police card out for him to verify.

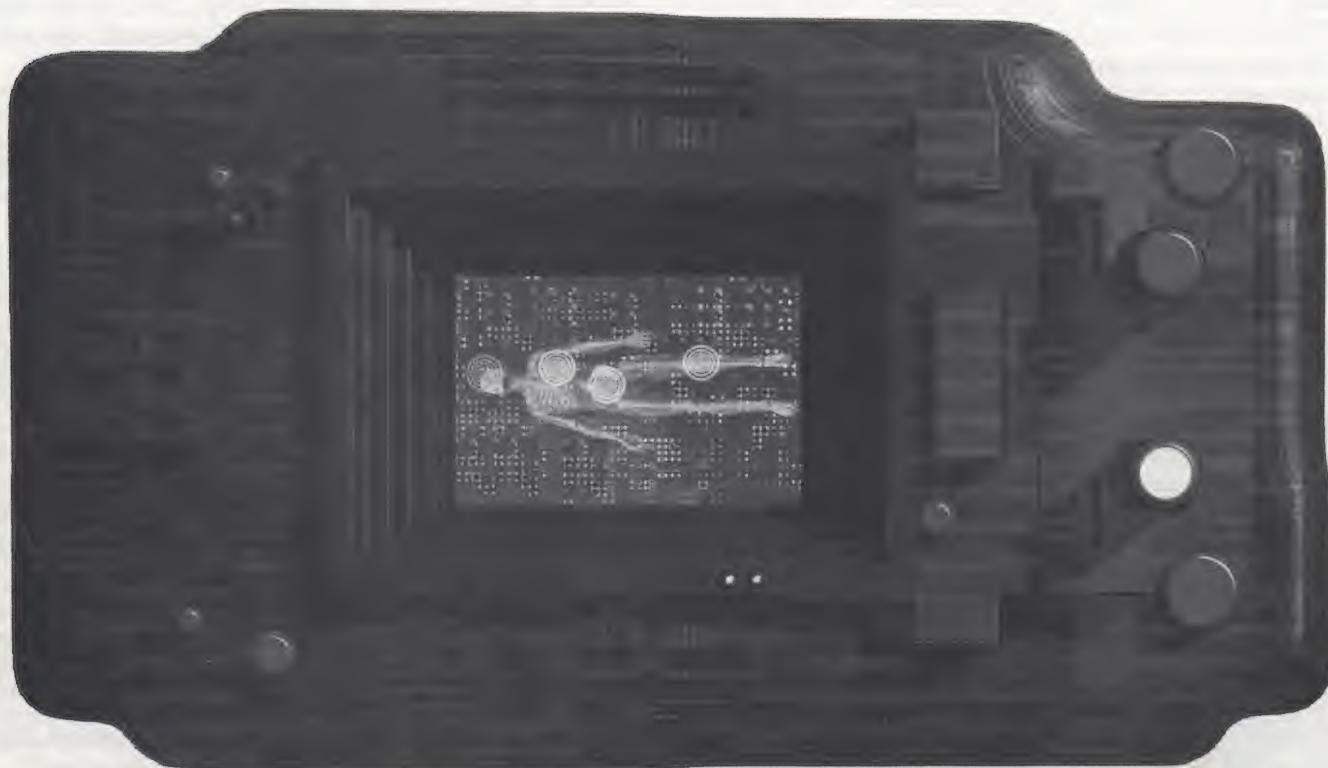
He didn't bother to show it to his cybofax. "I don't doubt who you are," he murmured. Three cars were parked on the street outside, their blue lights flashing insistently. Neighbours were pressed up against windows watching the drama. A Globecast camera crew lurked at the end of the drive, pointing their fat black lenses at him.

"Richard Townsend?" the detective demanded.

He put on a smile as polite as circumstances would allow. "Guilty of that, at least."

"Would you please accompany me to the station, sir. I have some questions for you."

"And if I refuse?"



"I will arrest you."
"For what, exactly?"

"Your suspected involvement in the murder of Byrne Tyler."

Richard stared at her in astonishment, then managed to gather some dignity. "I hate to ask you this in such a public arena." He indicated the camera crew. "But are you quite sure you have the right house?"

"Oh yes, sir. I have the right house. It's yours."
"Very well. May I at least get dressed first?"

"Yes, sir. One of my male colleagues will accompany you." He gave a grunt of surprise as he realized just how serious she was. "I think I'd like my one phone call now as well."

"That's America's Miranda rights, sir. But you're certainly free to call a solicitor if you think you require one."

"I don't require one to establish my innocence," Richard snapped. "I simply wish to sue you into your grave. You have no idea how much trouble this mistake will bring down on your head."

Richard suspected the layout of the interview room at Oakham police station was deliberately designed to depress its occupants. Straight psychological assault on the subconscious. Drab light-brown walls shimmered harshly under the glare from the two biolum panels in the ceiling. The grey-steel desk in front of him vibrated softly, a cranky harmonic instigated by the buzzing air-conditioning grille.

He'd been in there for 20 minutes alone, dourly contemplating this ludicrous situation, before the door opened and Jodie Dobson came in.

"About time," he barked at her. "Can I go now?"

She gave him a sober look. "No, Richard. This isn't some case of mistaken identity. I've been talking to Detective Patterson, and they really do think you had something to do with Byrne Tyler's murder."

"That's insane! I've never even met him."

"I know, and I'm sure we can clear it up with a simple interview."

"I want that Patterson cow sued for doing this to me. They tipped off the news team. I'll have my face plastered all over the media. Do you know what kind of damage that'll do to me? Business is about trust, credibility. I can't believe this! She's ruined five years' hard work in five minutes. It was deliberate and malicious."

"It's not that bad. Listen, the quicker you're out and cleared, the quicker we can instigate damage limitation."

"I want her to make a public apology, starting with that news crew that was outside my bloody house."

"We can probably get that. But you'll need to co-operate. Fully."

"Fine, bring them on!" He caught the tone in her voice. "What do you mean?"

"They've brought in some kind of specialist they want to sit in on your interview. Greg Mandel, he's a gland psychic."

Richard hoped his flinch wasn't too visible. There were stories about gland psychics. Nothing a rational adult need concern themselves about, of course. Human psi ability was a strictly scientific field these days, quantified and researched. A bioware endocrine gland implanted in the

brain released specific neurohormones to stimulate the ability. But... "Why do they want him to interview me?"

"Help interview you," Jodie stressed. "Apparently his speciality is sensing emotional states. In other words, he'll know if you're lying."

"So if I just say that I didn't kill this Byrne Tyler, Mandel will know I'm being truthful?"

"That's the way it works."

"Okay. But I still want Patterson nailed afterwards."

Richard gave Mandel a close look when he entered the interview room. Approaching middle age, but obviously in shape. The man's movements were very... precise; moving the chair *just so* to sit on rather than casually pulling it out from the desk as most people would. Richard supposed it was like a measure of confidence, and Mandel seemed very self-assured. It was an attitude very similar to Alan O'Hagen's.

Amanda Patterson seated herself beside Mandel, and slotted a couple of matte-black memox crystals into the twin AV recording deck.

"Interview with Richard Townsend," Patterson said briskly. "Conducted by myself, Detective Patterson, with the assistance of CID advisory specialist Greg Mandel. Mr Townsend has elected to have his solicitor present."

"I did not kill Byrne Tyler," Richard said. He stared at Mandel. "Is that true?"

"In as far as it goes," Mandel said.

"Thank you!" he sat back and fixed Patterson with a belligerent expression.

"However, I think we need to examine the subject in a little more detail before giving you a completely clean slate," Mandel said.

"If you must."

Mandel gave Patterson a small nod. She opened her cybofax and studied the display screen. "Are you a partner in the Firedrake company, Mr Townsend?" she asked.

"What?"

"A company called Firedrake, do you own half of the shares?"

"Well, yes. One share, 50 percent. But that's nothing to do with Byrne Tyler. It's a venture with a... a business colleague."

"Who is that?" Mandel asked.

"Not that it's anything to do with you or this murder enquiry, but his name is Alan O'Hagen."

"Interesting," Detective Patterson said. "The other listed shareholder in Firedrake is Newton Holdings."

"Well, yes, that's O'Hagen's company."

"No, Mr Townsend. According to the companies register, Newton Holdings is owned by Byrne Tyler."

Richard gave Jodie a desperate look. She frowned.

Detective Patterson consulted her cybofax again. "You've been partners for two years, is that right?"

"I... I've been a partner with Mr O'Hagen for two years, yes." He couldn't help the way his eyes glanced at Mandel. The psychic was watching him impassively. "Not Byrne Tyler. I've never met him. Never."

"Really?" Patterson's tone was highly sceptical. "Have you ever visited the Sotheby's office in Stamford?"

Richard hooked a finger round his shirt collar; the air conditioning wasn't making any impression on the heat suddenly evaporating off his skin. O'Hagen! O'Hagen had scammed him. But how? He wasn't a fool, he hadn't paid O'Hagen any money, quite the opposite. The painting... Which the police obviously knew about. "Yes, I've been there."

"Recently?"

"Earlier this week actually. I think you know that, though, don't you? I was having an item of mine valued for insurance purposes."

"Was that item a painting?" Mandel asked.

"Yes."

"And didn't you also confirm its authenticity while you were there?"

"I suppose so, the assistant had to make sure it was genuine before she valued it. That's standard."

"And the painting definitely belongs to you?"

"It does."

Mandel turned to Patterson. "Well, that's true."

"Of course it is, I was given it some time ago by Mr O'Hagen," Richard said. "It was a gift. He will confirm that."

"I shall be very interested in talking to this Mr O'Hagen," Patterson said. "That's if you can ever produce him for us." She turned her cybofax round so Richard could see the screen, it held the image of *View of a Hill and Clouds*. "Is this the painting, Mr Townsend?"

"Yes it is."

"For the record, *View of a Hill and Clouds* by Sean

McCarthy belongs to Byrne Tyler. The artist was a friend of the deceased. It was stolen from his apartment, presumably at the same time that he was murdered."

"No," Richard hissed. "Look, okay, listen. I'd never even heard of Firedrake until this week. Taking me on as a partner was a way of proving its viability to the banks. O'Hagen wanted a loan from them, that was the only way he could get it. We fixed it to look like I'd been a partner for two years."

"Richard," Jodie warned.

"I'm being set up," he yelled at her. "Can't you see?"

"Set up for what?" Patterson asked; she sounded intrigued.

"Byrne Tyler's murder – that's what I'm in here for, isn't it? For Christ's sake. O'Hagen's rigged this so it looks like I was involved."

"Why would Mr O'Hagen want to do that to you?"

"I don't fucking know. I've never met him before."

"Mr Townsend."

Mandel's voice made Richard lurch upright. "Yes?"

"You've never killed anyone yourself, but did you ever pay a man to eliminate somebody for you?"

Richard gaped at the psychic. In his head a panicked voice was yelling *oh shit oh shit oh shit*. Mandel would be able to hear it, to taste the wretched knowledge. His own shock-induced paralysis was twisting the emotion to an excruciating level. He thought his head was going to burst open from the stress.

Mandel gave him a sad, knowing smile and said: "Guilty."

Two – A Suspicious Fall

Detective Amanda Patterson had never visited Bisbrooke before. It was a tiny village tucked away along the side of a deep valley just outside Uppingham. Unremarkable and uneventful even by Rutland's standards, which made it a contender for dullest place in Europe. Until today, that is, when one of the uniforms had responded to a semi-hysterical call from a cleaning agency operative, and confirmed the existence of a body with associated suspicious circumstances.

The unseasonal rain beat down heavily as she drove over from Oakham, turning the road into a dangerous skid-rink. Then she had almost missed the turning off the A47. As it happened, that was the least of her navigational worries.

"Call him again," she told Alison Weston. The probationary detective was sitting in the passenger seat beside her, squinting through the fogged-up windscreen trying to locate some landmark.

"No way. Uniform will crap themselves laughing at us if I ask for directions," Alison complained. "It's got to be here somewhere. There can't be more than five buildings in the whole godforsaken village."

Amanda let it go. Hailstones were falling with the rain now, their impacts making clacking sounds on the car's bodywork. She braked at yet another T-junction.

Bisbrooke was woven together by a lacework of roads

barely wide enough for a single vehicle. They all curved sharply, making her nervous about oncoming cars, and they were all sunk into earthen gullies topped with hedges of thick bamboo that had been planted to replace the long-dead privet and hawthorn of the previous century. With the rain and hail pummelling the windscreen, it was perilously close to driving blind. The only clue they were even in the village was the occasional glimpse of ancient stone cottages and brick bungalows huddled at the end of gravelled drives.

"You must be able to see the church," she said. The address they had been given was in Church Lane.

Alison scanned the swaying tops of the bamboo shoots. "No." She gave her cybofax an instruction, and it produced a satnav map with their location given as a small pink dot. "Okay, try that one, down there on the left."

Amanda edged the car cautiously along the short stretch of road where Alison was pointing. The tarmac was reduced to a pair of tyre tracks separated by a rich swathe of emerald moss.

"Finally!" The junction ahead had a small street sign for Church Lane; a white-painted iron rectangle almost overgrown by a flamboyant purple clematis. This road was even narrower. It led them past the village church, a squat building made from rust-coloured stone that had

long since been converted into accommodation units for refugee families.

The lane ran on past a big old farmhouse, and ended at a new building perched on the end of the village. Church Vista Apartments. Its design was pure Californian-Italian, completely out of place in the heart of rural England. Five luxury apartments sharing a single long building with a stable block and multi-port garage forming a courtyard at the rear. Climbing roses planted along the walls hadn't grown half way up their trellises yet.

There was a tall security gate in the courtyard wall. Amanda held her police identity card up to the key, and it swung open for her. A police car and the cleaning agency van were parked on the cobbles beyond. Amanda drew up next to them. The rain was easing off.

They moved briskly over the cobbles to the door of apartment three. One of the uniforms was standing just inside, holding the heavy glass-and-wood door open. She didn't have to flash her card at him, as Rutland's police force was small enough for them all to know each other.

"Morning, Rex," she said as she hurried into the small hallway. He nodded politely as she shook the water from her jacket. "What have we got?"

"Definitely a corpse."

Alison slipped in and immediately blew her cheeks out. Her breath materialized in the air in front of her. "God, it's bloody freezing in here."

"Air conditioning's on full," Rex said. "I left it that way, I'm afraid. Scene-of-crime, and all that."

"Good," Amanda muttered, not meaning it. The chill air was blowing over her wet clothes, giving her goosebumps.

Rex led them into the apartment. It was open-plan downstairs, a single space with white walls and terracotta tile flooring; Mexican blackwood cabinets and shelving were lined up around the edges. There were pictures hanging on every wall; prints, chalk and charcoal sketches, oils, watercolours, silver-patina photographs. Most of them featured young female nudes. Three big plump cream-coloured leather settees formed a conversation area in the middle, surrounding a Persian rug. A woman in the cleaning agency's mauve tunic sat on one of the settees, looking shaken.

The front of the room was twice the height of the back. Wide wrought-iron stairs curved up to a balcony which ran the entire width, giving access to all the upstairs rooms. A sheer window wall in front of the balcony flooded the whole area with light.

The corpse lay at the foot of the stairs. A man in his mid-to-late 20s, wearing a pale grey dressing gown, his legs akimbo on the tiles, head twisted at a nasty angle. Some blood had dribbled from his nose. It was dry and flaking now.

There were three air-conditioning grilles set in the edge of the balcony. One of them was right above the corpse, blowing a stream of the frosty air directly over him.

"He fell down the stairs?" Alison asked.

"Looks like it," Rex said.

"So was it a fall, or a push?" Amanda wondered out loud.

"I had a quick look round upstairs," Rex said. "No sign of any struggle. The main bed's been used, but everything

seems to be in place as far as I can tell."

Amanda wrinkled her nose up. There was a faint smell in the air, unpleasant and familiar. "How long's he been here?"

"Possibly a day," Rex said.

Alison gestured at the window wall. "And nobody saw him?"

"One-way glass," Amanda said. It had that slight give-away grey tint. She stared through it, understanding why the apartments had been built here. The last of the rainclouds had drifted away, allowing the hot sun to shine down. It was a magnificent view out over the junction of two broad rolling grassland valleys. In the distance she could see an antique windmill, its wooden sails painted white. A long communal garden stretched out ahead of her, a paddock beyond that. There was a circular swimming pool 20 metres away, surrounded by a flagstone patio. Wooden-slat sun loungers were clustered round stripy parasols.

"All right," she said wearily. "Let's do the preliminary assessment."

Alison opened her cybofax. "When was the body discovered?"

"Approximately 8.45 this morning," Rex nodded towards the cleaning woman. "Helen?"

"That's right," the woman stammered. "I saw him – Mr Tyler – as soon as I came in. I called the police right away."

Amanda pursed her lips and knelt down beside the body. The handsome face had quite a few resonances for her. Byrne Tyler. She remembered him mainly from *Marina Days*, a soap set amid Peterborough's yachting fraternity – though 90 percent of it was shot in the studio with the all-action boating sequences cooked on a graphics mainframe. That had been five or six years ago; Byrne played a teenage hunk crewman. But he had left and gone on to star in action-thriller dramas and interactives. Pretty bad ones if she remembered her tabloid gossip right. There would be media attention with this one.

She stood up. "Helen, was the door locked when you arrived?"

"Yes. And the alarm was on. I have the code, and my palm is one of the keys. Mr Tyler was happy with that. He was a nice man. He always gave me a Christmas bonus."

"I'm sure he was lovely. Did you do all his cleaning?"

"Yes. Twice a week. Tuesday and Friday."

"Which means he could have been here since Tuesday." She rubbed her arms, trying to generate some warmth. "Rex, go see if the air conditioning was set like this or if it's glitched. Alison, look round for empty bottles, or anything else," she said pointedly. It could so easily be an accident. Drunk, stoned, or even sober, a fall could happen. And God knows what a showbiz type like Tyler would take for amusement in the privacy of his secluded secure home.

Amanda went upstairs to check the main bedroom. The door was open, revealing a huge circular waterbed with a black silk sheet over the mattress: there was no top sheet. An equally large mirror was fixed to the ceiling above it. She shook her head in bemusement at the stereotyping. Exactly the kind of seduction chamber a C-

list celebrity sex symbol was expected to have. She remembered most of his scenes in *Marina Days* involved him being stripped to the waist, or wearing tight T-shirts.

Apart from the offensive decor, there was nothing overtly suspicious. A slower look and she realized the sheet was rumpled, pillows were scattered about. She stared. One person wouldn't mess up a bed that much, surely? On the bedside cabinet was a champagne bottle turned upside down in a silver ice bucket, a single cut-crystal flute beside it.

When she went back downstairs, Rex told her the air conditioning was set at maximum. Alison was wearing plastic gloves; she held up a clear zip bag with a silver-plated infuser in it.

"Damn," Amanda grunted. "Okay, call the scene-of-crime team, and forensic. Let's find out exactly what happened here. And tell the uniform division we'll need help to cordon off the area."

Forty minutes later, Denzil Osborne drove up in the forensic team's white van. Alone. Amanda always found Denzil immensely reassuring. It was probably the phlegmatic way the forensic officer treated crime scenes when he arrived. Nothing ever fazed him.

"Where's the scene-of-crime team?" she asked as soon as he eased his huge frame out of the van.

"Vernon says he wants hard evidence there's been a crime before he'll authorize that kind of expense."

Amanda felt her cheeks reddening. All those orders she'd snapped out in front of Alison were making her look stupid now, empty wishes showing where the true authority in the police force lay. England's police had got rid of the PSP political officers observing their cases for ideological soundness, only for the New Conservatives to replace them all with accountants. She wasn't sure which was worse.

"And the uniform division?"

He winked broadly. "You've got Rex, haven't you?"

"Sod it," she snarled. "Come on, this way."

Denzil took one look at Byrne Tyler's sprawled body and said: "Ah yes, I see why you wanted forensic now. Of course, I'm no expert, but I think he may have fallen down the stairs."

She stuck her hands on her hips. "I want to know if he was pushed. I also want to know if he was even alive up on the balcony when it happened."

Denzil put his case on the floor beside Tyler, and lowered his bulk down next to it, wincing as his knees creaked.

"And you should lose some weight," she said.

"Come horizontal jogging with me – I'd lose kilos every night."

"That's sexual harassment." She just managed to keep a straight face in front of Alison.

He grinned wildly. "Yes please."

"Just tell me what happened here."

Denzil opened his case, revealing a plethora of specialist 'ware modules. He pulled on some tight plastic gloves before selecting a sensor wand which he waved over the dead man's face: then he stopped and peered closer. "Ah, a celebrity death. Best kind. Did you see his last? *Night Squad III: Descent of Angels*. Saving the

world from card-carrying terrorists yet again. There was some cool helijets in that. They had nuclear-pumped X-ray lasers; cut clean thorough buildings."

Chuckles, Denzil resumed his scan of Tyler's face. "Shame about the air conditioning," he said. "I can't work a simple temperature assessment on him."

"That's what made me wonder," Amanda said. "If he did get pushed then we won't be able to pinpoint the time very easily."

"Hmm. Maybe not pinpoint, but let's try something a little more detailed." Denzil replaced the sensor wand and took another cylinder from his case. It had a needle 15 centimetres long protruding from one end, which Denzil slowly inserted into Tyler's abdomen then withdrew equally carefully. "Anything else immediately suspicious?"

Alison held up the zip bag with the infuser, and another bag with phials. "We think he was infusing this. Probably syntho."

"Where have you been, young lady? I'll have you know, it's dreampunch this season for the glitterati. Couple of levels up from syntho, it's supposed to stimulate your pleasure centre and memories at the same time. Every hit a wet dream."

"Can you walk around when you're tripping it?" Alison asked.

"Okay, good point. They normally just crash out and drool a lot."

"I'll need DNA samples from the bed as well," Amanda said. "I think he had someone up there before he died."

Denzil gave her a curious look. "Vernon won't give you the budget for that kind of workover. I'm just authorized for a body analysis, determine cause of death, that kind of thing."

"Just do what you can for me, okay."

"Okay. CID's paying." The cylinder with the needle bleeped, and he consulted the graphics displayed on its screen. "According to cellular decay, he died sometime on Wednesday night, between 2200 hours and 1.30."

"That's a big window. Is that the best you can give me?"

"I always give you my best, Amanda. That's the preliminary, anyway. Let me get him into the lab and I can probably shave half an hour off that for you. The delay and this bloody arctic temperature doesn't help."

Amanda stood up and turned to Alison. "There's some reasonable security 'ware here. See what kind of records are available for this week, especially Wednesday evening. Rex, take a full statement from Helen, and let her go. And I want this place sealed as soon as the body's removed. We'll get authority to run a proper site examination eventually."

"You really think this was a murder?" Denzil asked.

"Too many things are wrong," Amanda said. "Somebody told me once: there's no such thing as coincidence."

Inspector Vernon Langley was putting his jacket on when Amanda walked into his small shabby office. He took one look at her, slumped his shoulders and groaned. "I'm due out for lunch," he said defensively.

"I was due a scene-of-crime team," she shot back.

"All right." He sat back behind his desk and waved her

into a spare seat. "Amanda, you know we're severely restricted on how much we can spend on each case. Some syntho-head fell down stairs. Bag him up and notify the relatives."

"I think he was murdered."

Vernon grimaced. "Not the air conditioning, please."

"Not by itself, no. But Denzil scanned the control box. No fingerprints. It had been wiped clean with a damp kitchen cloth."

"Means nothing. The cleaning lady could have done that on her last visit."

"Unlikely. Vernon, you just don't have the air conditioning on that cold, not for days at a time. I also had Alison check the security 'ware. A car left at 23.13, Wednesday night – a Rover Ingalo registered to Claire Sullivan. It's loaded into Church Vista Apartments security list as an approved visitor for Byrne Tyler, so the gate opens automatically for it. Alison's mining the Home Office circuit for Sullivan now."

Vernon scratched at his chin. "I took a look at Denzil's preliminary file; time of death is very loose. This Sullivan woman will simply claim Tyler was alive when she left."

"Of course she will," Amanda said with a hint of irritation. "That doesn't mean we don't ask her."

Vernon looked unhappy.

"Oh, come on," she exclaimed.

"All right. I'll give you the time to interview her. But you don't get anything else without a positive result."

"Well, hey, thanks."

"I'm sorry, Amanda," he gave her a resigned smile. "Things just ain't what they used to be around here."

"Someone like Byrne Tyler is bound to have crime insurance coverage. We'll get the money to investigate properly. It won't even come out of your budget."

Vernon's mood darkened still further. "I'm sure he has coverage. Unlike 70 per cent of the population."

Alison had tracked down Claire Sullivan's address, which was in Uppingham. She had also prepared quite a briefing file for Amanda, most of it mined from tabloid databases.

Amanda let the probationary detective drive to the Sullivan bungalow as she scanned the file on her cybofax. "Tyler was engaged to Tamzin Sullivan?"

"Yep, Claire's big sister. She's a model, got a contract with the Dermani house. Mainly on the back of the publicity she and Tyler were getting. They've hit the showbiz party trail extensively since the engagement was announced. You open your front door in the morning, and they'll be there for it. On their own, neither of them was important enough to get an image on the gossip 'casts; together they rate airtime. It helps that they have the same management agency."

Amanda looked at the image of Tamzin the screen was showing, posed for a Dermani advert, bracelet and earring accessories for a stupidly-priced couture dress. The girl was beautiful, certainly, but it was a lofty beauty implying arrogance.

"So what's her little sister doing at her fiancé's house in the middle of the night?"

"One guess," Alison said dryly. "I always used to be jealous of my sister's boyfriends. And Byrne was no saint. I didn't load the real gutter-press reports for you, but they say he got fired from *Marina Days* because he couldn't leave the girls alone."

Amanda scrolled down the file to Claire. The girl was 18, a first-year medical student at DeMontfort University. Still living at home with her mother. The university fees were paid by her father as part of a child-maintenance agreement. He lived in Australia. Amanda skipped to the mother: Margina Sullivan.

Pre-judgement went against the nature of Amanda's training, but Margina's record made it difficult to avoid. She had three children, each with a different father – each of whom was wealthy enough to support their offspring with independent schooling and an allowance. The Inland Revenue had no employment record for Margina Sullivan. Her tax returns (always filed late) listed a couple of small trust funds as her income source. She owned the bungalow in Uppingham where she lived along with Claire, Tamzin, and Daniel, her nine-year-old son; but her credit rating was dismal.

By the time they arrived at the address, an image of Margina had swollen into Amanda's mind, hardening like concrete: ageing brittle harridan.

The Sullivan bungalow was just beyond the centre of town, in the middle of a pleasant estate dominated by old evergreen pines which had survived the climate change. The wood and brick structure itself was well-maintained, with glossy paintwork and a roof of new solar panels, but the garden clearly hadn't seen any attention for years. Two cars were parked outside: a BMW so old it probably had a combustion engine, with flat tyres and bleached paintwork hosting blooms of moss; next to it was a smart little scarlet and black Ingalo, a modern giga-conductor powered runabout that was proving popular as a first car for wealthy young trendies.

Margina Sullivan opened the door. Amanda assumed they had caught her going out; she was wearing some extravagant dress complemented by a white shawl cardigan. Heavy make-up laboured to recreate the youthfulness of what was undeniably an attractive face. Not a single bottle-red hair was out of alignment from her iron-hard curled beret style. She put a hand theatrically on her chest when shown Amanda's police ID card and *oohed* breathlessly. The phoney concern changed to shock and barely concealed anger when Amanda regretfully informed her of Byrne Tyler's death. Margina hurried over to the drinks cabinet and poured herself a large Scotch.

"How am I going to tell Tamzin?" she gulped. Another shot of whisky was poured. "God in heaven, what are we going to do? *Starlight* was paying for a bloody wedding exclusive, not a funeral."

A curious way of expressing grief, Amanda thought. She kept quiet, looking round the lounge. It was chintzy, with lavender cloths covering every table and sideboard, tassels dangling from their overhanging edges. Figurines from the kind of adverts found in the most downmarket weekend datatext channels stood on every surface. Tall, high-definition pictures of Tamzin looked down serenely

from each wall, campaigns for a dozen different fashion products. Amanda would have liked to be dismissive, but the girl really was very beautiful. Healthy vitality was obviously The Look right now.

Claire and Daniel came in, wanting to know what was happening. Amanda studied the younger girl as her perturbed mother explained. Claire didn't have anything like her elder sister's poise, nor was there much resemblance – which was understandable enough. She had sandy hair rather than lush raven; her narrow face had a thin mouth instead of wide full lips; and her figure was a great deal fuller than that of the lean athlete. Nor was there any of Tamzin's ice-queen polish, just a mild sulkiness.

Daniel was different again... wide-eyed and cute, with a basin-cut mop of chestnut hair. Like every nine-year-old, he could not stay still. Even when told of Tyler's death he clung to his sister and shivered restlessly. The affection between the siblings was touching. It was Claire who soothed and comforted him rather than his mother. Amanda's attitude hardened still further when Margina went for yet another shot of whisky.

"Where is Tamzin at the moment?" Alison asked.

"Paris," Margina sniffed. "She has a runway assignment tonight. I must call Colin at Hothouse – they're her agents; he can arrange for her to be flown home. We'll release a statement on the tragedy from here."

"A statement?"

"To the media," Margina said irritably. "Hothouse will see to it."

"Perhaps you should call the Hothouse people now," Amanda said. "In the meantime I have some questions which I need to ask Claire."

Margina gave her a puzzled glance. "What questions?"

Amanda steeled herself. This wasn't going to be pleasant. She could do the preliminary interview with the girl here or at the station. Either way, Margina, and after that Tamzin, would find out why. I'm not a social worker, she told herself. "We think Claire might have been the last person to see Mr Tyler alive."

"Impossible," Margina insisted. "You said he died at home." She rounded on Claire. "What does she mean?"

The girl hung her head sullenly. "I saw Byrne on Wednesday evening."

"Why?"

"Because he was screwing me," Claire suddenly yelled. "All right? He'd been screwing me for months. How the hell do you think I bought my car? From the money my loving father gives me?" She burst into tears. Daniel hugged her tighter, and she gripped at him in reflex.

Margina's mouth opened. She stood absolutely still, staring at her daughter in disbelief. "You're lying. You little bitch. You're lying!"

"I am not!" Claire shouted back.

Amanda stepped between them, holding her hands up. "That's enough. Claire, you're going to have to come to the station with us."

The girl nodded.

"You could have ruined everything," Margina cried shrilly. "Everything! You stupid stupid bitch. You've got a whole university full of men to sleep around with. What

the hell were you thinking of?"

"Don't you ever care about anyone but yourself? Ever? You don't know anything, you're just an ignorant old fraud."

"I said: enough," Amanda told them. "Mrs Sullivan, we can arrange for a social case officer to counsel you and Tamzin if you would like."

Margina was still glaring at Claire, her breathing irregular. "Don't be absurd," she said contemptuously. "I'm not having a failed psychology graduate asking me impertinent questions as if I were some feeble-brained dole dependant. Colin will take care of everything we require."

"As you wish," Amanda said calmly.

Amanda decided to question the girl in her office rather than the station interview room. It was marginally less inhospitable. She got her a cup of tea, and even managed to find some biscuits in one of the desk drawers.

Claire didn't pay any attention, she sat with her head in her hands.

"Did you love him?" Amanda asked tenderly.

"Ha! Is that what you think?"

"I don't know. I'm asking."

"Of course I didn't love him." Her head came up abruptly, a worried expression on her face. "But I didn't kill him."

"Okay. So tell me why you were having a relationship with him?"

"It wasn't a relationship. He seduced me. I suppose. We'd gone to see Tamzin at a fashion show in Peterborough this Easter. He fixed it somehow that I was driven back home in his limo. It was just him and me. I'd had a lot to drink."

"Did he rape you?"

Claire gave a helpless grimace. "No. He was interested in me. That's never... Tamzin was always the one. She's always been the one. It's like she was born with two people's luck. Everything happens for her. She's so pretty and glamorous. Byrne Tyler was her boyfriend. I mean, *Byrne*. I used to watch him on *Marina Days*."

"So you were flattered, and it was exciting."

"Suppose so."

"And afterwards? Then what happened?"

"He said he wanted to keep seeing me."

"You mean to have sex?"

Claire blushed and hung her head. "Yes."

"So you went back? Voluntarily?"

"Mum's really frightened, you know? You wouldn't be able to tell, not with her. She doesn't let anyone see. But she is. We don't have any money; mum's in debt to dozens of shops, just for food half the time. We can't get credit anywhere locally any more – no bank will issue her with a card. Tamzin... well she can look after all of us. Since she met Byrne her career is really taking off. She earns tons of money."

"So what did Byrne Tyler tell you?"

"He said to just keep things going the way they were. That he'd never tell Tamzin as long as he was happy, and everything would stay the same."

"And he bought you the car?"

"Yes. It was so I could drive out to Bisbrooke whenever he wanted me. He used to call me in the evenings, when Tamzin was away on an assignment. I'd tell mum I had late study at DeMontfort. It's not like she'd know any different."

"And you were there on Wednesday evening?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"When did you arrive?"

"About nine o'clock."

"And you left when?"

"Just after eleven."

"And Byrne Tyler was alive when you left?"

"Yes! I swear it. I left him in bed. I got dressed and went home."

"Was there anyone else there with you?"

"No. Just me."

"Claire, do you remember if it was cold in the apartment that night?"

"No. It never is. Byrne didn't like sheets or duvets on the bed. He always kept the bedroom warm enough so he didn't have to use them."

Amanda noted that in her cybofax. "Interesting. I need to know about the bedroom, I'm afraid. Did you have champagne up there that night?"

"Yes."

"We only found one glass. Isn't that a bit odd?"

"Oh." Claire looked hard at the top of the desk. "I have the glass. Byrne liked to... well, he poured some on me."

"I see. Did he say if he was meeting anyone else after you left?"

"No. Nothing like that."

"Had he met anyone before you arrived?"

"I don't know. He never said."

Amanda sighed, resisting the impulse to reach out and grip the girl's shoulder in reassurance. "Sounds like you've had a pretty rough few months."

"It wasn't that... I know it all sounds awful. He really liked me, though. You must think I'm some dreadful cheap tart."

"I don't think that at all. But what I'd like to do is refer you to a counsellor. I think you could do with someone to talk to right now."

"Maybe. Do I have to?"

"No. But I'd like you to think about it."

"I will. Can I go now?"

"Just about finished. I'll need a DNA sample from you to eliminate any traces we find at the apartment. After that you're free to go."

"Why do you need that?"

"Because this is now a murder investigation."

"Why is it murder?" Vernon asked.

"Claire claims the air conditioning was operating normally when she left."

"Tyler could have changed it."

"We've been over this. That temperature isn't one you can live in. The only reason to change it is to fudge the time of the murder. And the controls were wiped. The murderer did that."

"All right, damnit. I've done some background data-

work for you. He was insured by his management agency, and we now have reasonable doubt. I'll squirt the appropriate information off to them. We should get a response fairly quickly."

"Thank you. I'd like a scene-of-crime team to look at the apartment, and a full autopsy."

"I can give you that now."

"Great. I'll also need full access to all of Tyler's financial and personal data. Alison can start running it through some analysis programs."

"Okay, I'll have a magistrate sign the order this evening." Vernon fixed her with a thoughtful stare. "Did the girl do it?"

"She certainly had the motive. She was there around the time it happened. Unless we can put someone else at the scene, she's the obvious choice." She caught his troubled expression. "What?"

"I don't get it. She was smart enough to lower the temperature, so she must have realized everyone would find out she was sleeping with Tyler. Why not simply say he slipped, that it was an accident?"

"Guilt. Plain and simple. Trying to cover her tracks. You can see it in the way she talks. She's cautious about every word that comes out of her mouth, as if she'll give herself away just by speaking."

"Okay, Amanda, if you say so."

The next morning Amanda caught the Tyler story on Globecast's breakfast news. She was smoking an extremely illicit cigarette, trying to calm herself for the day to come. Tyler didn't rate much time: archive footage of him arriving at some glitzy party with Tamzin on his arm; the fact they were engaged, and she was believed to be flying home to be with her family; and a mention that the police investigation was ongoing, hinting that officers considered the circumstances unusual.

How do they find out so quickly? she wondered.

Amanda checked in at the station first, mainly to make sure there were no problems with Alison's analysis. The probationary detective gave her a grumpy look from behind her desk. Four terminal cubes were full of what looked like Inland Revenue datawork as she used her court access order to pull in details from his accountant, agent, solicitor and banks. Apparently Byrne Tyler's financial affairs were complex to the point of obscurity, not helped by the way showbusiness used accounting methods unknown to the rest of the human race. Amanda told her to concentrate on finding out if he had any large debts, and to confirm that he had bought the Ingalo for Claire.

With that part of the investigation on line she was ready to drive up to the apartment and supervise forensic's sweep. Vernon brought Mike Wilson to see her before she could get away. Wilson was from Crescent Insurance, who provided cover for Tyler. A real smoothy, she thought as they were introduced. Late 30s, in a smart blue-grey business suit at least two levels above a detective's price range, ginger hair neatly trimmed, a body he had kept in condition without being an obvious gym-rat. She didn't think he'd had any cosmetic alteration, his cheeks were slightly too puffy; but he certainly used too much aftershave.

"How much coverage did Tyler have?" she asked.

"His agency had taken out a full investigatory package," Mike Wilson said. "Whatever it takes to get the culprit into court and secure a conviction."

"Sounds good to me. Just give us your credit account details, we'll invoice you."

Wilson's smile was tolerant. "I'm afraid it's not that simple. We like to see first hand what our money is being spent on."

She gave Vernon a tight you're-kidding-me look. He smiled in retaliation. "Mike Wilson will be assigned to your team for the duration of the investigation."

"As what?"

"I have worked on a number of police cases," Wilson said. "I appreciate you don't want what you regard as outside interference—"

"Bloody right I don't."

"—however, the facts are that I can offer immediate access to considerable specialist resources such as forensic labs and database mining, which the police have to outsource anyway. And I'm certainly happy to finance any reasonable police deployment, like the scene of crime search. That goes without question."

"How active do you see your helpful role?"

"I only offer advice when I'm asked for it. It's your investigation, Detective."

Her terminal bleeped for attention. Mike Wilson and Vernon Langley watched expectantly. Without making too big a deal of it, Amanda sat behind her desk and pulled the call through. It was Denzil.

"I have good news and good news," he said. "From your point of view anyway, if not Byrne Tyler's."

"What did you find?"

"Narcotic toxicology was minimal, except for a very recent infusion of Laynon. Our boy was improving his bed-time performance that night, but nothing more. But there were plenty of residual traces. He's a regular and long-time user of several proscribed drugs. However he didn't have enough of anything in his bloodstream to impede locomotion or cause disorientation at the time he died."

"The champagne?"

"Minimal alcohol level, he couldn't have drunk more than half a glass."

"Thanks, Denzil. What else?"

"Dried saliva trails on his skin. And small scrapings of skin under two fingernails."

"They must be from Claire." She glanced up at Mike Wilson, raising an eyebrow. He gave a small bow. "Run a DNA comparison for me, Denzil."

"Yeah, I heard we got money." His image vanished from the screen.

Wilson gave Vernon a meaningful look. "If it is the sister, the tabloid channels are going to have a feeding frenzy."

Amanda made an effort at conversation on the drive up to Bisbrooke. It wasn't that Wilson was unlikable; but her instinct was that he had no place on the investigation. Of course, intellectually, she appreciated his presence was due to social injustice rather than politics. External funding was a factor she would have to accept, especially

in the future.

With the body gone and the air conditioning back to normal, the apartment had lost its cheerless quality. Two scene-of-crime officers were moving methodically through the ground floor, examining every surface with a variety of sensor wands. Rex was out in the courtyard, taking statements from the neighbours.

"What do you need to move for a prosecution?" Mike Wilson asked as they took a look at the cast-iron stairs.

"Basically, a lack of any other suspects. I expect the prosecution service will accept she changed the air conditioning. She is a medical student, after all."

"So you'll interview his friends to see if anyone threatened him?"

"Friends, his agency, people he worked with. The usual. I'd love to try and track down his supplier, as well. But that would really cost you — they don't exactly rush out of the woodwork at times like these."

He gave a small grin. "I know."

"Previous case?"

"Crescent insures a lot of celebrity types. Having dealt with them before, I can see why we set the premiums so high."

"Really?" Amanda was wondering if he was going to let any gossip loose when her cybofax bleeped. Denzil's face appeared on the screen with an indecently malicious expression. "What?" she asked cautiously.

"The saliva is Claire's. The skin under the fingertips is not."

"Oh bugger," she groaned. Even so, some part of her was glad Claire had possibly been cleared. Although she was still convinced the girl was hiding something. "Run a match through the central criminal records at the Home Office." She didn't even consult Mike Wilson with that one.

"Already running," Denzil said. "Plot getting thicker, huh?"

"Yeah, right." She ended the call.

Wilson was looking up at the top of the stairs. "So what do you think? Skin scrape from whoever pushed him."

"Looks that way. One last desperate grasp as he started to fall." She walked over to the red outline of the body on the terracotta tiles, and turned a full circle. "So what else have we got? No sign yet of a forced entry, which implies either the security 'ware let them through or it was a professional hit and they could burn through the system without a trace."

"Pushing someone off the top of the stairs isn't a widely-used assassination method. It's heat-of-the-moment. Which fits."

"Fits what?"

"Someone turned up just after Claire left. A friend, or someone he knew. He let them in. There was an argument. It would also explain the air conditioning. If it was a professional hit, then whoever did that wouldn't need to confuse the time of death, it wouldn't matter to them. For some reason, our murderer still cares about messing with the time."

"Still doesn't fit. If it was a friend, then the security 'ware would have an admissions record. There was nobody."

"We'd better have it checked very thoroughly, then. Get into the base management program and see if there's any sign of tampering."

Amanda nodded. "You have somebody who can do that?"

"Oh yes."

"While they're at it, make sure they enhance the surveillance picture of the Ingalo when it left, I'd like to confirm no one was inside along with Claire."

"Fair enough. What else do you need?"

She gestured out of the window wall. "Unless it was a real professional who yomped in over the fields, the only way to get here is to drive through the village. And believe me, that's not so easy. Bisbrooke is small, and confusing. The villagers would know all about strange cars. I want a door-to-door enquiry asking if any of them saw anything that night, any cars they didn't recognize, as well as full interviews with the neighbouring apartments."

"That's a lot of labour-intensive groundwork. Could we just wait and see if the DNA register comes up with anything first?"

"Okay. We need the other angle anyway. This will give us some time."

"Other angle?"

"The motive, Mike. Personal, or financial, or professional jealousy, whatever... We need to start the good old-fashioned process of elimination. So, you get your expert here to examine the security 'ware, and I'll get back to the station and give Alison a hand with Tyler's finances."

It was late afternoon when Alison slapped a hand down on her terminal keyboard with a disgusted sigh, cancelling a search program. "He doesn't have bloody finances, you've got to have money for that. All Tyler has are debts."

Which wasn't strictly true. Amanda glanced at Tyler's bank statement again. To think, she always worried about her monthly salary payment arriving in time to satisfy her standing orders and credit-card bill. Some people obviously operated on a higher plane. Although he owed close to quarter of a million New Sterling, the banks just kept extending his credit limit. Why he didn't pay it off she couldn't understand. His cashflow was more than adequate. Of course, neither she nor Alison could track down where half of the money actually came from, and in most cases where it went. One account at a bank in Peterborough was used just for withdrawing large sums of hard cash.

Amanda looked over at Mike Wilson who was studying some of the details himself. "I think we might justifiably request a qualified accountant at this point."

He ran a hand back through his hair, looking at a twisting column of numbers in one of the cubes with a perplexed expression. "I think you might be right."

Denzil came in and grinned at the blatant despondency in the room. "Having fun?"

"Always," Alison said sweetly.

"I have a positive result."

Amanda sat up fast. "What?"

"The skin scrape is definitely nobody we know of. No record of that DNA in the Home Office memory core. I even

squirted the problem over to Interpol. They don't have it either. And before you ask, neither does the FBI." He gave Wilson an affable smile. "You'll get the bill tomorrow."

"I live for it."

"You want me to look elsewhere? Most countries will co-operate."

"I think we'll have to," Amanda said. "After all, that DNA is our murderer. Mike?"

"I agree. Although, I'd like to suggest widening the search parameters."

"How?"

"Organizations such as Interpol and the FBI simply store the DNA of known criminals. If it were a professional hit, I'd say search every police memory core on the planet. However, we favour the theory that this was a heat-of-the-moment killing, do we not?"

"I can go with that," she said.

"Then our murderer is unlikely to be listed."

"It was always a long shot, but what else can we do?" She pointed at the cubes full of financial datawork. "If we can find a motive, we can track the murderer that way."

"Crescent has a DNA-characteristics assembly program. I suggest we use that."

Denzil whistled quietly. "I'm impressed."

"I might be," Amanda said. "If I knew what you were talking about."

"The genes which make us what we are, are spaced out along the genome, the map of our DNA," Mike Wilson said. "Now that we know which site designates which protein or characteristic, like hair colour or shape of the ear, it's possible to examine the genes which contribute to the facial features and see what that face will look like."

"You mean you can give me a picture of this person?" Amanda asked.

"Essentially, yes. We can then ask Tyler's friends and acquaintances if they recognize him... or her." He waved a hand at the busy terminal cubes. "Got to be easier than this, quicker, too. Crescent can also run standard comparison programs with the visual images stored in our data cores, and with the security departments of all the other companies we have reciprocal arrangements with. I think you'll find they're considerably more extensive than the criminal records held by governments. For a start, between us, the insurance companies have copies of every driving licence issued in Europe. And we already decided the murderer drove to Bisbrooke."

Amanda studied him. This was suddenly too easy. Something was wrong, and she couldn't define it... apart from an intuitive distrust she had for the corporate machinator. And yet, he was helping. Solving the crime, in all probability. "How long will it take?"

"If we courier a sample of the DNA over to Crescent's lab in Oxford this evening, the program can crunch the genome overnight. We can have the picture by morning."

"Okay. Do it."

Amanda hated working Sundays. No way round it this week, though. And maybe, just maybe, she might get overtime, courtesy of Crescent.

When she arrived at the station there was an unusu-

ally large crowd of people in the main CID office for the time and day, uniform division as well as detectives. Alison gave Amanda a wry smile as she came in.

"The scene-of-crime team found something interesting," she said in a low voice, suggesting conspiracy. "No shortage of volunteers to go over this lot for us."

"What?" Amanda asked. She edged through the group to look at the flatscreen they were all absorbed with. It was a split-screen image, three viewpoints of the main bedroom in Byrne Tyler's apartment. Tyler himself was on the bed with a girl, their naked bodies writhing in animal passion.

Alison held up a carton full of memox crystals. "There's a lot of them. Over 60."

"Okay." Amanda walked over to the AV player and switched it off. "That's enough. This is supposed to be a bloody police station, not a porno shop."

They moaned, one or two jeered, but nobody actually voiced a complaint. The group broke up, filing out of the CID office with sheepish grins and locker-room chuckles.

"They found three cameras in there yesterday," Alison said. "Quite a professional recording set-up. Looks like Tyler was something of an egotistical voyeur."

"Was he recording Wednesday night?" Amanda asked sharply. At least that explained why he didn't have a top sheet on his bed, she thought.

"No. Or at least, there was no memox of it. The AV recorder the cameras are rigged to was empty."

"Pity."

Alison rattled the carton. "Plenty more suspects: all the husbands and boyfriends."

The little black cylinders rolled about. Ten-hour capacity each. Amanda found herself doing mental arithmetic. Assuming they were even half-full, Tyler had been a very busy boy. Popular, too. "Is there an index?"

"Yes." Alison flourished a ziplock bag containing several sheets of paper. "In ink no less – I guess he didn't want to risk this list getting burned open by a hotrod. Mostly just first names, but he got some surnames as well; and they've all got dates. They go back over two years. There's quite a few personalities I recognize."

"Okay, scan the list in to your terminal and run the names through a search program. Then see if a visual-characteristics recognition program can identify the girls we don't have full names for. I want to know where all of them live, if they're married or have long-term partners, parents of the younger ones, that kind of thing. Oh, and check to see if all the crystals are there."

Mike Wilson walked in past the last of the uniform division. His expression was bleak. "What did I miss?" he enquired.

"Tyler liked to record himself in bed," Alison said. "We found the crystals."

"Oh, shit. We'd better keep that quiet."

Amanda frowned. Not quite the response she expected. "I was planning on it," she said. "How did the DNA characteristics assembly go?"

He flipped open a shiny chrome Event Horizon executive cybofax and gave it an instruction. A young man's face appeared, light brown hair, greenish eyes, a thin nose,

broad mouth. There was a small digital read-out in the corner of the screen saying: 18 Years. It started to wind forwards. The man began to change, ageing. Wrinkles appeared, the cheeks and neck thickened; the hairline receded, grey streaks appeared. The display finished at 80 years, showing a wizened face with shrunken cheeks plagued by liver spots, and wisps of silver-white hair.

"Denzil was right," Amanda said. "That's impressive. Just how accurate is it?"

"Perfectly accurate."

"You sound unhappy."

"There was no positive match."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh, we got hundreds of people who share 85 to 90 per cent similarity. We just captured an image from every five years of his life and the computer ran a standard visual comparison reference program for each of them. In total we have access to pictures of 225 million Caucasian males. Can you believe it? Nothing over 90 per cent."

Alison couldn't work out if she was disappointed or not. Mike Wilson had sounded so sure this was the solution, and now for all the astonishing technology and corporate data cores they had to revert to humble police work. "Give us the top 20 off your list, and we'll start to work through them, check if they knew Tyler, alibis, the usual. English residents to start with, please."

"Okay," he acknowledged the request with a subdued nod. "Who the hell did this? The only way this murderer could elude our programs is with major plastic surgery, changing his appearance."

"Someone in showbusiness, then," Alison said brightly.

"The percentage is a lot higher among celebrities than the rest of the population. They're always improving their appearance."

"Could be." Uncertainty was a strong presence in his voice.

"Alison, that can be your priority," Amanda said. "We'll turn Tyler's finances over to a professional accountant. That'll free us to interview friends and colleagues, see if any of them recognize this picture." Her finger tapped the cybofax screen. "I'll start with the Sullivans. You concentrate on his fellow celebrities."

Alison was just going out the station door when she caught sight of a silhouette in the reception area, a man talking to the desk sergeant. "Greg?"

Greg Mandel turned round. His eyes narrowed for a second, then he grinned. "Amanda Patterson, right? Detective sergeant?"

She shook the hand he offered. "Detective, now."

"Congratulations."

"Thanks. So what are you doing here?"

"Checking on a vehicle accident. One of Eleanor's family was hurt."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Any luck?"

"None at all."

"Yeah, well, you know how the police force works. Traffic doesn't get the highest priority these days. Want me to pull any strings?"

"No. That's okay, thanks. I guess CID's pretty busy

with the Tyler case. I saw it on the news."

"Yeah. It's my case, too." She glanced from Greg back to Mike Wilson who was standing waiting politely. Asking never hurt, she thought, and she'd had a reasonable relationship with Greg during an earlier case when he'd been appointed as a special advisor to Oakham's CID. "Look, Greg, I realize this probably isn't the best time to ask you, but the Tyler case is really a ball-breaker for me. We're hitting a lot of stone walls."

"Uh huh." Greg's expression became reluctant, trying to work out how to extricate himself.

"Just sit in on one interview, Greg, that's all I need. I've got a suspect I'm not sure about. How about it? You can cut straight through all the usual crap and tell me if she's on the level. We can even pay you a fee. Mike here is from Crescent Insurance, they're picking up the tab for Tyler."

Greg and Mike eyed each other suspiciously.

"What exactly is your field?" Mike asked.

"I have a gland," Greg said mildly.

Amanda enjoyed the discomfort leaking over Mike Wilson's face. She'd endured the same feeling the first time she met Greg; every guilty memory rushing to the front of her mind.

"I thought we'd cleared Claire?" Mike Wilson protested.

"She was at the apartment very close to the time," Amanda said. "And I know she's holding something back. That's why I need a psychic, to see where I'm going wrong. If I knew the right questions to ask her I bet we could take some big steps forward."

Mike Wilson clearly wanted to object; just didn't have the nerve.

"Detective's intuition, huh?" Greg asked.

"Must be catching," she told him spryly.

He consulted his watch. "Okay. I can give you an hour. But I'll have to call Eleanor first, let her know where I am."

She couldn't resist it. "Under the thumb, Greg – you?"

His smile was bright and proud. "Certainly am, I have two women in my life now. Christine is six months old."

"Oh, I didn't know. Congratulations."

"Thanks."

Amanda and Mike Wilson took it in turns to brief Greg on the case as they drove out to Uppingham. Just before they got to the roundabout with the A47 at Uppingham, Greg said: "I'd like to take a look at the apartment first."

"Why is that necessary?" Wilson asked.

"It's best if I can get a feel for the event," Greg said. "Sometimes my intuition can be quite strong. It might help with the interview."

They pulled up in Church Vista's courtyard. Greg got out and looked round, head tilted back slightly as if he was sniffing at the air. Wilson watched him, but didn't comment. There was a police seal on the door to apartment three, which Amanda's card opened.

Greg went over to the red outline at the foot of the stairs. "What was the result from the security 'ware?"

"As far as we can tell it's clean," Mike Wilson said. "If it was tampered with, then whoever did it covered their tracks perfectly."

"Hmm." Greg nodded and started to walk round, glanc-

ing at the coffee table with its spread of glossy art books.

"We've collected statements from all the neighbours now," Amanda said. "None of them heard or saw any other car arriving or departing that night. It was only Claire and the Ingalo. And we've received the enhanced images from the security camera by the gates. She was the only person in it coming in and out."

"Well, I can appreciate your problem," Greg said. He was walking along the wall, examining the pictures one at a time. "Circumstances make it look like a professional hit, but pushing Tyler down the stairs is strictly a chance killing."

"Tell me," Amanda muttered. "We know there was someone else here, we even know what they look like. But everything else we've got says it's Claire."

"Can I see the image you assembled from the genome data?"

Mike Wilson flipped open his cybofax and showed Greg the image while it ran through its 18-to-80 lifecycle.

"Doesn't ring any psychic bells," Greg said. He stopped beside the smallest painting on the wall, a picture of a hill with a strange object in the air above it. "This is a bit out of place, isn't it?" The pictures on either side were coloured chalk sketches of ballerinas clad only in tutus.

"Is that relevant?" Wilson asked as he slipped the cybofax back in his jacket pocket. He was beginning to sound more positive, overcoming his apprehension of the gland and its reputation.

"Probably not," Greg admitted. He led them up the stairs into the bedroom. The crime scene team had tagged the three cameras that were discreetly hidden within elaborate picture frames, the units no bigger than a coat button. Slender fibre-optic threads buried in the plaster linked them to an AV recorder deck in a chest of drawers.

"And you say there's no sign of a struggle?" Greg asked.

"No. The only thing messed up was the bed."

"Right." He stood in the door, looking at the top of the stairs. "If it was a professional hit, then the murderer could have waited until just after Claire had left, then thrown Tyler down the stairs. That would disguise the fact it was a hit, which would stop us looking for anyone else with a motive. Was Tyler alive when he fell?"

"The autopsy says yes. The impact snapped his neck, he was killed instantly."

"What about bruising or marks? If he was alive when he was forced to the stairs he would have put up some kind of struggle."

"No bruising," Amanda said.

"That doesn't necessarily follow," Mike Wilson said. "He'd only struggle if he realized what was happening. If the murderer made out he was a burglar and made him walk to the stairs with a gun to his head he wouldn't have fought back."

Greg pulled a face, looking from the bed to the stairs. "Yeah, this is all possible, but very tenuous. The simplest explanation is usually the correct one." He went over to the chest of drawers, and bent down to study the AV recorder, fingertips tracing the slender optical threads back into the skirting board. "How old is this place?"

"The apartment was finished two and a half years ago,"

Amanda said. "Tyler moved in just over two years ago."

"So he probably had it wired up then," Greg said. "How much did the apartment cost him?"

"Five hundred and fifty thousand New Sterling. There's over 400,000 outstanding on the mortgage. He was late with several payments."

"So he doesn't own it. I thought he was rich."

"By our standards he's loaded. But he had one hell of a lifestyle, and he didn't star in that many action interactives. Strictly C-list when it comes to the celebrity stakes. He's definitely short of hard cash."

Greg went over to the bed, running a hand along the edge of the mattress. "Did he make any recordings of himself with Claire?"

"I'm not sure," Amanda said. "Let me check if Alison's loaded the list in yet." She opened her cybofax and linked in to the station 'ware. "We're in luck, she's just finished it. Let's see... Yes, there's three crystals of Claire."

"When was the last one dated?"

"Three weeks ago."

"Why the interest?" Mike Wilson asked.

"That's a lot of recording time for one girl," Greg said. "And Claire doesn't come over here that often, or stays long when she does. That suggests he records every time. So why didn't he record last Wednesday night?"

"He did," Amanda said instinctively. She could see where he was going with this. "And the murderer took the memox crystal because he was caught by the cameras in here. Which implies that whoever the murderer is, he struck very quickly after Claire left. So close the recorder was still on."

"No messing," Greg said.

Tamzin Sullivan had returned home. When Amanda, Greg and Mike Wilson were shown into the bungalow, the bereaved girl was sitting in the lounge. To show her grief at the loss of her future husband she was wearing traditional black in the form of a less traditional micro dress with a deep scoop-top. Colin, from Hothouse, was fussing round with her mother while a seamstress made last minute adjustments to the shoulder straps, a make-up artist was finishing off the girl's face.

It was Claire who had answered the door and ushered them in. As soon as the sisters glanced at each other the atmosphere chilled to a level below that Tyler's apartment had ever reached. Daniel, who was lurking behind the sofa, shrank away from the visitors.

"This is not an appropriate time for you to be here," Margina said imperiously. "The *Starlight* crew will be here any minute."

"I apologize for interrupting you at what is undoubtedly a difficult time," Amanda said; it was her best official sympathy voice. She marvelled she could manage to keep it irony-free. "But I'm afraid we do have some questions for Tamzin, and Claire again. We'll be brief."

Tamzin glanced at Colin, who gave a small nod.

"I'll help in whatever way I can," Tamzin said. "I want Byrne's murderer caught. Have you found the piece of scum yet?" Her gaze flicked pointedly to her sister.

"We have a possible suspect."

Mike Wilson showed her his cybofax, running the image. "Do you recognize this man? We think Byrne knew him."

Tamzin leaned forward with considerable interest, fabric straining. Amanda saw Wilson's glance slither helplessly down to her cleavage, and prayed hard no one else had seen.

"No. I don't."

He went on to show the image to Margina, Claire, and even Colin. They all said they had never seen the man before.

"What about threats?" Amanda asked. "Do you know if anyone was being abusive to him recently?"

"No," Tamzin said. "There was nothing like that. He did have a few crank callers, everyone as famous as us has them; but the agency screened them for him."

"I'd like a record of them, please," she told Colin.

"I'll get it squirted over to you," he promised.

"Thank you. Greg, anything you need to know?"

"The pictures in your fiance's apartment are interesting," Greg said. "How long's he been buying them?"

Tamzin blinked, slightly baffled. "Since he moved in, I suppose. Byrne appreciated fine art, music, culture; he wasn't just an action hero, you know. He was friends with a lot of people in the media and arts. Inspiring people. He was even writing a script for a drama that we would star in together. Now that's talent."

"Yes, I'm sure. The pictures are all original, aren't they?"

"They're Byrne's collection," Tamzin said in pique. "Of course they're original."

"I see. Thanks."

Amanda had somehow expected more; she had seen Greg interview suspects before. When he didn't ask anything else, she said: "I'd like to talk to Claire alone for a moment, please."

Margina's face tightened in fury; she gave her youngest daughter a warning glare as she stalked out. Tamzin didn't even bother with that; she ignored everyone as she left. It was Colin who was left to take Daniel's hand and lead the lad away.

Claire slumped down petulantly into the sofa. She was wearing an oversize rouge T-shirt and baggy black jeans; cloaking while Tamzin exhibited. Always opposites. "Now what?"

"I really will be brief," Amanda said. "This is going to be personal, I'm sorry. Did you know about Tyler's obsession with recording events in his bedroom?"

"You've found the memox crystals?" Claire asked in a small voice.

"Yes, we did."

"I knew you would. Byrne liked me to watch them with him. He enjoyed the ones of him with famous people. There were a lot; actresses and singers, socialites, people like that. I know it was all wrong, but one more bad thing on top of all the rest didn't seem to matter much, not by then."

"Do you know if he was recording the pair of you that night?"

"I don't know. I knew he did sometimes. I didn't ask. I never wanted to think about stuff like that."

Amanda took a quick look at Greg, who was watching

impassively. There was no clue as to what he saw with his sixth sense. "Thank you, Claire. I know that wasn't easy. I'd just like to go back to that night one more time. Did you see or hear anything unusual there?"

"No. I told you already, there was nothing different."

"Not even with Byrne – he wasn't acting oddly?"

"No."

"He didn't do anything that made you angry, or upset?"

"No! Why are you asking this? You think I did it, don't you? I didn't! *I didn't!* Tamzin thinks I did. Mum hates me. I didn't want any of this. You think I did?" Tears were starting to slide down her cheeks. She wiped at them with the back of a hand, sniffing loudly.

"Okay, Claire, I'm sorry. And you're sure you didn't recognize the man Mike showed you on the cybofax?"

"Yeah, I've never seen him. Who is he?"

"I wish we knew."

As soon as they all got back into Amanda's car, she turned to Greg. "Well?"

"Claire's telling the truth. She didn't kill him."

"God damn it! I'm sure she knows something about this."

"Not that I could sense. She certainly didn't recognize the killer's face, there was nothing odd about the apartment that night, and Byrne was behaving normally. You're going to have to come at it from a different angle."

"Shit." She faced forwards and gripped the steering wheel. "It has to be someone with a big vicious grudge eating at them."

"The murderer knew all about the cameras," Greg said. "Not that Tyler exactly kept it a secret. That makes it more likely to be a jealous boyfriend or husband of some girl that Tyler's had up there."

"Then why the hell can't we find a match for his face?"

"We'll get him," Mike Wilson said. "It's just a question of time now."

"Yeah, right." She switched on the power cell, and drove off. "Sorry to waste your time, Greg."

"I don't think you did," he said cautiously. "There's something not quite right about the crime scene. Don't ask what, it's just a feeling. I just know something's wrong there. It might come to me later; these things normally take time to recognize. Can I give you a call?"

"Please!"

"Thanks. So what's your next step?"

"Work through his friends and acquaintances, and the girls on the crystals. See if any of them recognizes the murderer. Just a hell of a lot of datawork correlation, basically."

Making sense out of Byrne Tyler's twisted finances was one of Amanda's biggest priorities. She had emphasized that often enough to Vernon and Mike Wilson, both of whom assured her of their total agreement. But there was no accountant waiting for her on Monday morning when she arrived at the station. Mike Wilson was in full apology mode, explaining that the person he had asked to be assigned to the Tyler case was finishing off another audit. "But he'll have completed that by tomorrow at the latest."

"You mean he'll be here tomorrow?"

"I would assume so." He handed her a memox crystal. "Peace offering. This came in from Tyler's agency. It's an index of all his professional contacts, people he's worked with over the last 18 months. They've also got records of his crankier fans."

Amanda gave the crystal a mistrustful glance; the number of people they were going to have to interview was expanding at an exponential rate. She went into the office to see what progress Alison had made identifying the girls on the memox crystals.

It was considerable. Amanda's eyebrows quirked several times as she ran down the list. For an ex-soap star he had an astonishing sex appeal. How he got to meet so many women in such a short time (during his engagement), and have such a success rate was beyond her. Sure he was boyishly handsome, and kept himself in top physical shape... They started to draw up an interview schedule. Most of it would have to be done over the phone; the preliminary inquiry, anyway.

Vernon called her into his office at 8.40, requesting a full briefing. He was appearing on Radio Rutland soon to explain the case to the public. The police station had been receiving a steady stream of requests from the media, which had doubled since *Starlight*'s interview and pictures of a mourning Tamzin had appeared on the datatext channels last night.

There wasn't much she could give him. They certainly weren't going to announce the failure of the characteristics assembly program to find the murderer. Vernon would just have to stick to confirming the investigation team was "progressing"; that anything else at this time could prejudice the case. He departed for the studio, fidgeting with his tie and collar.

Greg Mandel called her mid-morning, and asked to have a look around the apartment again. She agreed to meet him up there, glad for the break. The women on Alison's list that she'd called so far were uniformly apprehensive when they found out what the enquiry was about, brittle facades hiding real fear of discovery. It was a shabby process, leaving her feeling depressed and less than wholesome.

Greg's big EMC Ranger was waiting outside Church Vista's courtyard gates when she arrived.

"Any clue what you're looking for yet?" she asked when they went inside.

"Sorry, no. I guess I'm just here chasing phantoms." He tapped a finger on the rim of the glass and wood door leading out to the courtyard. "Logically, we ought to start with the point of entry. Do you have an idea where the murderer came in?"

Amanda flipped her cybofax open, and consulted the report from the scene-of-crime team. "No. According to the security 'ware logs, the main door here was opened at 21.12 hours with a duplicate card issued by Tyler, that's two minutes after the 'ware recorded the Ingalo driving in through the gates – which matches up with Claire's arrival. Then it was opened again at 23.09, from the inside, when she left."

"What's the security system like?"

"Good quality 'ware, standard application. All the doors

and windows are wired up, and the log function records every time they open and close; motion and infrared sensors, voice codeword panic mode with a satellite link to a private watchdog company. I'd be happy here."

"Sounds foolproof." Greg walked across the ground floor to the big window wall. Broad patio doors were set into it, to the left of the stairs. "What about this one?"

"It's a manual lock, you can only open it from the inside. There isn't even a catch outside." Amanda glanced at the log again. "That was closed from 1900 hours onwards." She followed after him as he went into the kitchen, which overlooked the courtyard. All the marble worktops were clean, there was nothing out of place, no food stains, tall glass storage pots of dried pasta unopened, spice jars full; even the line of potted ferns on the windowsill were aesthetic, healthy and well-watered. It was as though the whole place had been transplanted direct from a showroom. The band of windows above the sink had two sections which could open. Both had solid manual-key security bolts. Greg didn't even have to ask. "They haven't been opened for ages," she told him. "Not since June, actually."

There was a cloakroom next door; emerald-green ceramic tiles half way up the walls, cool whitewashed plaster carrying on up to the ceiling. A hand basin at one end, toilet at the other with a small window just above it, four panes of fogged glass. Greg went over and looked at it. The top half of the frame was open a crack, its iron latch on the first notch. When he lifted the catch and pushed it open further the hinges creaked, protesting the movement.

"My cat couldn't get through that," Amanda said.

"Fat cat," Greg replied. "What about upstairs?"

Main bedroom, the bathroom, and both guest bedrooms all had wide windows equipped with security bolts. Out of the ten which opened, the security bolts were unfastened or loose on three, leaving just the standard latch to deter burglars.

"How would they get up to them?" Amanda asked scep-

tically when they finished checking the last guest bedroom.

"I've used wallwalker pads in my army days," Greg said. "And I'm not sure how strong those trellises outside are, maybe they'd act like a ladder."

"Security log says they stayed closed. You want me to run forensic checks on the external wall?"

"Not particularly. If you have the technical expertise to circumvent window sensors, then you can walk straight in through the main door."

Amanda's cybofax bleeped. She accepted a call from Mike Wilson. The accountant definitely wouldn't be available before Wednesday – did she want to wait, or get someone else in? One was available for Tuesday, but Wilson hadn't worked with him before. Amanda scratched irritably at her forehead; as Crescent was paying, she

wanted results quickly, and, to her, one accountant was no different to any other. She said to get one in for Tuesday morning, first thing. It didn't matter who.

"No progress on finding a match for the murderer's face," Mike Wilson said. "And you won't believe how many of Tyler's showbiz pals have had discreet trips to the surgeon. It doesn't help our visual comparison programs."

She finished the call and went off to find Greg. He was downstairs again, crouching over the red body outline. "I've been thinking about motive," he said. "All we've come up with so far is jealousy."

"The accountant's in tomorrow – maybe we'll find a big debtor."

"Could be, except the kind of debt that drives someone to kill isn't normally one you'll find on the books. And killing

someone means you never get paid."

She glanced round at the paintings. Tyler had spent a lot of money on them, no matter how questionable his taste. "You think they stole something?"

"We know it had to be a professional who broke in here. It could have been someone trying to reclaim a debt the hard way. Maybe the death was an accident after all. What we have is a burglar who hadn't done enough research on his target to know Claire was making night-time visits. I mean, they certainly kept it quiet enough. Tyler was awake when he wasn't supposed to be."



"Could be," she said.

"Crescent Insurance must have a list of his paintings; it's simple enough to check they're all here."

"Okay. We'll try that."

"Sorry I can't come up with anything more concrete."

He made his way out, stopping to take one last look at the small odd painting. Frowning. Then left with a rueful wave.

Amanda used her cybofax to connect directly into Crescent's memory core, and requested Tyler's home contents file. Greg was wrong. All the insured paintings were there. Amazingly the most expensive one was *View of a Hill and Clouds*. She paused in front of it, not quite believing what she was seeing was worth 20,000 New Sterling. Art, she thought, just wasn't for people like her.

The accountant did arrive on Tuesday morning. He had brought three customized cybofaxes and a leather wallet full of memox crystals loaded with specialist financial analysis programs. His assiduous preparation, eagerness, and self-confidence did a lot to offset the fact that he looked about 18. Amanda assigned Alison to assist him.

Greg turned up at the station just before lunch. "I got your message about the paintings," he said. His manner was reticent, not like him at all.

"It was worth following up," she assured him. "I would have got round to doing it anyway."

"That feeling I had that something was out of kilter. I know what it is now. It's that small oil painting, the funny one with the flying saucer or whatever. I'm sure of it."

"What's wrong with it?"

"I don't know, but something is."

"I know it stands out from the others. But it turns out Tyler knew the artist: they went out partying together when McCarthy visited England a few years back. And believe it or not, it's the most expensive piece there."

"Ah." Greg began to look a lot more contented. "It's wrong, Amanda."

"How? It's still there, it wasn't stolen."

"You asked me in on this, remember?" he said gently. "I didn't think I'd have to convince you of all people about my gland all over again."

She stared at him for a minute while instinct, common sense, and fear of failure went thrashing about together in her head. In the end she decided he was worth the gamble; she had asked him in because she wanted that unique angle he could provide. Once, she'd heard Eleanor, his wife, call his talent a foresight equal to everyone else's hindsight.

"How do you want to handle it?" she asked in a martyred tone.

He grinned his thanks. "Somebody who knows what they're about needs to take a look at that painting. We should concentrate on the artist, too... get Alison to mine some background on him."

"Okay." She called Mike Wilson over.

"An art expert?" he asked cynically.

"Crescent must have a ton of them," Greg said. "Art fraud is pretty common. Insurance companies face it every day."

"We have them, yes, but..."

"An expert has told us something is wrong with the painting, and this is my investigation," she said, not too belligerently, but firmly enough to show him she wasn't going to compromise on this.

He held his hands up. "All right. But you only get three lives, not nine."

Hugh Snell wasn't exactly the scholarly old man with fraying tweed jacket and half-moon glasses that Amanda was expecting. When he turned up at Church Vista Apartments he was wearing a leather Harley Davidson jacket, a diamond stud through his nose, and five rings in his left ear. His elbow-length Mohican plume was dyed bright violet.

He took one look at Tyler's collection and laughed out loud. "Shit. He spent money on these? What a prat."

"Aren't they any good?" Amanda asked.

"My talent detector needle is simply quivering... on zero. One hates to speak ill of the dead, my dear, but if all he wanted was erotica, he should have torn the centre pages out of a porno mag and framed them instead. This simply reeks of lower middle-class pretension. I know about him, I know nothing of the artists – they say nothing, they do nothing."

Mike Wilson indicated the McCarthy. "What about this one?"

Hugh Snell made a show of pulling a gold-rimmed monocle from his pocket. He held it daintily to his eye and examined the painting. "Yeah, good forgery."

Amanda smiled greedily. "Thanks, Greg."

"No problem."

"It's insured for 20,000," Wilson said.

"Alas my dear chap, you've been royally shafted."

"Are you sure?"

Hugh Snell gave him a pitying look. "Please don't flaunt your ignorance in public view, it's frightfully impolite. This isn't even a quality copy. Any halfway decent texture printer can churn out 20 of these per minute for you. Admittedly, it will fool the less well versed, but anyone in the trade would see it immediately."

"Makes sense," Amanda said. "The smallest and most valuable item, you could roll it up and carry it out in your pocket."

"Certainly could," Greg murmured.

"I owe you an apology, Mr Mandel," Mike Wilson said.

"Not a problem," Greg assured him.

"Congratulations," Wilson said to Amanda. "So it was a burglary which went wrong, then. Which means it was a professional who broke in. That explains why we've been banging our heads against the wall."

"A pre-planned burglary, too, if he'd brought a forgery with him," she said. "I bet Tyler would never have noticed it had gone."

"Which means it was someone who knew Tyler had the McCarthy on his wall, and how much it was worth."

Amanda went up to the McCarthy; and gave it a happy smile. "I'll get forensics back to take a closer look at it," she said.

Three – Degrees of Guilt

Greg managed three hours of sleep before Christine decided it was time to begin another bright new day. His eyes blinked open as her cries began. Nothing in focus, mouth tasted foul, limbs too heavy to move. Classic symptoms – if only it were a hangover, that would mean he'd enjoyed some of last night.

"I'll get her," Eleanor grumbled.

The duvet was tugged across him as she clambered out of bed and went over to the cot. "Isn't it my turn?" he asked as the timbre of the crying changed.

"Oh, who cares?" Eleanor snapped back. "I just want her to shut up."

He did the brave thing, and kept quiet. In his army days he'd gone without sleep for days at a time during some of the covert missions deep into enemy territory. Oh, to be back in those halcyon times. Christine could teach the Jihad Legion a thing or two about tenacity.

Eleanor started to change their daughter's nappy.

The doorbell rang. Greg knew he'd misheard that. When he squinted, the digital clock just made it into focus: 6:23. The bell went again. He and Eleanor stared at each other.

"Who the hell...?"

Whoever they were, they started knocking.

The hall tiles were cold against his feet as he hopped over them to the front door. He managed to pull his dressing gown shut just before he flicked the lock over and pulled the door open. A young man with broad bull shoulders had his arm raised to knock again.

"What the bloody hell do you want?" Greg yelled. "Do you know what time it is?" Christine was wailing plaintively behind him.

The young man's defiance melted away into mild confusion. "Eleanor lives here doesn't she?"

"Yes." Greg noticed what the man was wearing, a pair of dark dungarees with a cross stitched on the front, blue wool shirt, sturdy black leather boots. It was his turn for a recoil; he hadn't seen a kibbutznik since the night he faced down Eleanor's father. "Who are you?" He ordered a tiny secretion from his gland, imagining a tiny mushroom squirt of white liquid scudding round his brain, neurohormones soaking into synaptic clefts. Actually, the physiological function was nothing like that; picturing it at all was a psychological quirk that most Mindstar Brigade veterans employed. There's no natural internal part of the human body which can be consciously activated; only muscles, and you can see that happen. So the mind copes by giving itself a picture of animation to explain the onrush of ethereal sensation. The result left him sensing an agitated haze of thoughts, entwined by grief. The man had forced himself to the Mandel farm against all kinds of deep-rooted doubts.

"I'm Andy," he said it as though puzzled that Greg didn't already know... as though his name explained away everything. "Andy Broady. Eleanor's brother."

Andy sat in a chair at the kitchen table, uncomfortable despite the cushion. He'd glanced round with a type of jealous surprise at the oak cupboards and tiled work surfaces. Greg followed his gaze with a mild embarrassment. The fittings were only a few years old, and Mrs Owen came in to clean and help with Christine three times a week; but the room was still a mess. Baby bottles, washed and unwashed were all over the worktops, two linen baskets overflowing with clothes, packets of rusks, jars of puréed apple and other mushy, disgusting-tasting food were stacked in shop bags ready to be put away. Last night's plates and dishes were waiting on top of the dishwasher. Big, rainbow-coloured fabric toys underfoot. Half the broad ash table was littered with the financial print-outs which Eleanor had generated as she worked through summaries of the citrus grove crop and market sales.

Christine gurgled quietly in Andy's lap, and he looked down at his new niece with guilty surprise. His lips twitched with a tentative smile. He held her with the stiff terror of every bachelor, frightened that he'd drop her, or she'd start crying, or burp, or choke or...

"How old is she?"

"Coming up six months." Eleanor opened the dishwasher and retrieved three cups.

"She's lovely."

"Make me an offer, you can take her home with you today."

Andy's head came up in shock. Greg gave him a reassuring wink. Eleanor filled the cups from the Twinings carton and put them in the microwave. Greg never used to like instant tea, quietly fancying himself as a reasonable cook. These days everything was in convenience units.

Eleanor sat opposite her brother, and gave him a sympathetic look. "All right, what's happened, Andy?"

"Happened?"

"You wouldn't have come here otherwise."

He nodded reluctantly. "It's dad. There was an accident."

"Oh, shit." Eleanor let out a sigh, rubbing at her eyes. "How bad?"

"He was hit by a car. We took him back home, but he can't move. He hurts a lot, and he's hot... like with fever. Coughs blood. Other end, too."

"And of course he won't go to hospital."

Andy shook his head, too glum to speak.

She put her hand on his arm, squeezing reassuringly. "Who's looking after him?"

"Paddy, but he's not as good as you were at medicine and such. Don't have real training. Dad didn't want any of us to go to college for courses, not after you left. Said that all outside the kibbutz was an evil place, that it corrupts us." He gave Greg a nervous glance. "Said that the devil stole you away."

"I wasn't stolen, Andy; I was driven away. I saw what life can be like if you just have the courage to live it." Her hand moved to Greg. "And have a little help."

He kissed the top of her head. Andy's expression hardened.

"I'm not arguing with you Andy," she said. "But we're all free to make choices. Even you, because I know he didn't ask you to come up here today."

"So? Will you come and see him?"

"Yes, Andy, I'll come."

It was a funny kind of day to find the perfect definition of mixed feelings, Greg thought, but now here he was torn between complete disapproval and devotion. Didn't want Eleanor to go anywhere near the kibbutz, let alone back inside, and couldn't leave her to do it alone.

It didn't take long to drive to Egleton. The kibbutz was on the other side of the tiny village, on a flat expanse of land that bordered the road. One side of it was Rutland Water, a shoreline which ironically put only a short stretch of water between them and the Mandel farm's citrus groves on the peninsula. Close in miles, but not in time.

Eleanor had described the kibbutz to him often enough, there were even a few places on the farm where he could just make out their roofs over the top of the coconut palms they'd planted along their section of shore. Even so it came as a surprise. The buildings were all single-storey, clumped together in three concentric rings with the church in the centre. Long huts that were half house, half barn or stable. Unlike anything else built since the Warming, they didn't have glossy black solar-panel roofs, just flat wooden slates. Brick chimney stacks fumed wisps of grey wood smoke into the clear sky. Beyond the outermost ring, a pair of donkeys were harnessed to a wooden pole, circling a brick well-shaft, turning some incredibly primitive pump.

The fields surrounding the buildings were planted with corn, barley, maize and potatoes; dense clumps of kitchen vegetables in each one made them resemble oversized allotments. Some had fruit trees, small and wizened, with zigzag branches and dark-green glossy leaves. Greg drove the Ranger down a rough dirt track that indicated a boundary. They stopped at a gate in the maze of tall sturdy wooden fences which surrounded the buildings; paddocks and corrals containing goats, donkeys, cows, some elderly horses, llamas. Neither the crops nor the livestock were genetically modified varieties, Greg noticed.

He busied himself unstrapping a sleeping Christine from her baby seat while Eleanor looked round her old home with pursed lips. She grunted abruptly, and pulled the first-aid case from the Ranger's boot, slamming it down. They made quite a spectacle walking to the Broady home through the dried mud which filled the space between the buildings, while dogs barked and giant black turkeys waddled away squawking loudly. Several children ran alongside, giggling and calling to Andy. They seemed well fed, Greg thought, though their clothes were all home-made and patched. The adults still milling among the buildings eyed them suspiciously. Several must have recognized Eleanor, because they nudged each other and traded meaningful looks.

Eleanor didn't even hesitate when she reached the front door. Shoved it open and walked in. Greg and Andy fol-

lowed. It was a single long room, brick oven with iron doors at one end, bed at the other, with a few simple pieces of furniture between. The walls were hung with pictures of Jesus and Mary. Windows had shutters rather than glass.

A pale figure lay on the bed, covered by a single thin blanket. Greg probably wouldn't have recognized Noel Broady. He'd only seen the old man once before, years ago, the night he met Eleanor. If any two people in the world were destined never to be friends, it was him and Noel.

Now though, that stubborn face was sunken and sweating. Grey hair had thinned out, several days' stubble furred his cheeks and chin, flecked with dry saliva.

His eyes flickered open and he turned his head at the commotion. A dismissive grunt. "I told that boy not to go bother you."

"Andy's not a boy any more, father, he's a man who makes his own decisions. If he wants to tell me about you, he can do."

"Stubborn. Stubborn." He coughed, his shoulders quaking, and dropped his head back on the thin pillow. "Have you not yet learned God's humility, girl?"

"I respect God in my own way, father."

"By leaving us. By turning your back on Jesus and your family." His finger rose to point at Greg. "By lying with that abomination. You live in sin, you will drown in sin."

"Greg is my husband now, father. You were invited to the wedding."

"I would not despoil all I have taught my flock by giving you my blessing."

"Really?" Eleanor put the first-aid case on the floor, and opened it. She took out the diagnostic patch, and applied it to the side of her father's neck. He frowned his disapproval, but didn't resist.

"You have a granddaughter," she said in a milder tone. She began running a hand-held deep-scan sensor along his arms, switching to his ribcage. A picture of his skeleton built up in the cube of her Event Horizon laptop terminal.

Noel's weak gaze moved to the bundle riding in Greg's papoose; for a moment surprise and a lonely smile lifted the exhaustion from his face.

"She's called Christine," Greg said, moving closer so he could see. Christine stirred, yawning, her little arms wiggling about.

"She looks handsome, a good strong child. I will pray for her." Talking was a big effort for him, the words wheezing out. He coughed again, dabbing a pink-stained handkerchief to his lips.

Eleanor took a breath, consulting the terminal cube again. Greg didn't need his gland to see how worried she was.

"Dad, you have to go to hospital."

"No."

"You've got broken bones, and there's a lot of internal damage, bleeding. You have to go."

"If God calls me, then I will go to Him. All things are written, all lives decreed."

"God gave us the knowledge to save ourselves... that's why we've got doctors and medicine. They're his gifts –

are you going to throw them back in his face?"

"How well I remember these arguments. Always questioning and testing, you were. There are even some nights when I miss them." Noel gave her a thin smile. "How quickly you forget your scriptures. It was the serpent who gave us knowledge."

"Dad, please. It's really bad. I can't fix this sort of damage. You have to go to hospital. And quickly."

"I will not. Do not ask me again."

"Andy?" Eleanor appealed.

"Your brother's faith is strong, unlike yours. He respects all we have achieved, all we have built. Ours is a simple life, my dearest Eleanor. We live, and we believe. That is all. It is sufficient for any man. Everything else – this fast, plastic, electronic existence you have chosen – is the road to your own destruction. You can learn no values from it. It teaches you no respect for His glory."

"I value your life."

"As do I. And I have lived it true to myself. Would you take that dignity from me, even now? Would you punish me with your chemicals and mutilate me with your surgeon's laser scalpels?"

She turned to Greg, miserable and helpless. He put his arm around her, holding her tight. Noel was badly wrong about his own son, Greg sensed. Andy was desperate to intervene. There was a layer of fear and uncertainty running through his mind that was struggling to rise and express itself, held in check only by ingrained obedience. When he let his perception expand, Greg could feel a similar anxiety suffusing the entire kibbutz. It wasn't just shock and worry that their leader was harmed; some other affliction was gnawing at them.

"Well, I'm giving you some treatment anyway," Eleanor said defiantly. She bent down to the first-aid case, and began selecting phials for the infuser. "You can't run away from me."

Noel lay back, a degree of contentment showing. "The absence of pain is a strong temptation. I will succumb and pay my penance later."

Christine woke up and began her usual gurgle of interest at the world all around. "I'll take her out," Greg said. "Andy, could you give me a hand."

Andy gave his father an uncertain glance. Noel nodded permission.

Outside, Greg turned so that Christine was shielded from the bright rising sun. The kibbutz had resumed its normal routine of activity, interest in the visitors discarded. He looked across the collection of worn buildings with a kind of annoyed bemusement. Ten years of his life had been spent in active rebellion against an oppressive government, a decade of pain and death and blood so that people could once again have a chance to gather some dignity and improve their lives. And here on his own doorstep this group strove to return to medievalism at its worst, burdened by everlasting manual labour and in thrall to evangelical priests who could never accept anyone else was even entitled to a different point of view. A community where progress is evil.

The irony made him smile – something he would never have done before meeting Eleanor. A freedom fighter (now,

anyway – after all, they were the ones writing the history files) appalled by the use to which his gift of freedom had been put. People... they're such a pain in the arse.

"He's gonna die, isn't he?"

Greg bounced Christine about, enjoying her happy grin at the motion. "Yes, Andy, I think he is." The young man knew it anyway, just needed to be told by someone else. As if saying it would make it so, would make it his fault.

"I can't believe it. Not him. He's so strong... where it counts, you know."

"Yeah, I know it. I had to face him down once. Toughest fight in my life."

"That's my father." Andy was on the point of tears.

"What happened?" Greg scanned the kibbutz again. "There's no cars here, no traffic."

Andy's arm was raised, pointing away over the fields towards the road. "There. We found him over there. Helped carry him back myself."

"Can you show me, please?"

They tramped over the sun-baked mud tracks, moving along the side of the tall fences, a long winding route. Andy was quiet as they walked. Nervous, Greg assumed, after years of being warned of the demon who had captured his big sister.

"This is where we found him," Andy said eventually.

They were on a stretch of track running between two of the fences. Two hundred metres away towards Oakham was a gate which opened onto the tiny road linking Egerton with the A6003; a hundred metres in the other direction it led out into a paddock with other tracks and footpaths spreading off over the kibbutz land, a regular motorway intersection.

Greg knelt down beside the fence where Andy indicated. A herd of cattle on the other side watched them idly, chewing on the few blades of grass they could find amid the buttercups. The three lower bars of the fence were splintered, bowing inwards; and they were thick timber. It had taken a lot of force to cause that much damage. They had some short paint streaks along them, dark blue; a dusting of chrome flakes lay on the mud. Greg stood and tried to work out the angle of the impact. The car or whatever would have had to veer very sharply to dint the fence in such a fashion. It wasn't as though it would be swerving to avoid oncoming traffic.

"Was he right up against the fence?" Greg asked.

"Yeah, almost underneath it when we found him."

"Did he say what happened?"

"Not much. Just that the car was big, and it had its headlights on full. Then it hit him, he got trapped between it and the fence."

"Headlights? Was it night time?"

"No. It was early evening, still light."

"Did anyone else see it happen?"

"No. We started searching when he didn't turn up for evening chapel. It was dark by then; didn't find him till after ten."

"What about the car?" Greg indicated the gate onto the road. "It must have come from that direction, where was it going?"

"Don't know. Didn't come to us; haven't had no visitors

for a while. We're the only ones that use this bit of track. It's the quickest way out to the road."

"What do you use on the road?"

"We've got bicycles. And a cart; horse pulls it to market most days. We sell vegetables and eggs. People still like fresh food instead of that chemical convenience packet rubbish."

"Okay, so the car must have reversed away and got back onto the road afterwards. So was your father on a bike?"

"No." Andy shook his head ruefully. "He didn't even like them. Said: God gave us feet, didn't he? He always walked into town."

"Do you know what he was doing in town that day?"

"Gone to see the solicitor."

"What the hell did Noel want with a solicitor?"

"It's a bad business been happening here. A man came a month or so back. Said he wanted to build a leisure complex on the shore, right where we are. He offered us money, said that it wasn't really our land anyway and he'd help us find somewhere else to live. What kind of a man is that to disrespect us so? We built this place. It's ours by any law that's just and true."

"Right," Greg said. Now probably wasn't the best time to lecture Andy on the kind of abuses which the local PSP Land Rights committees had perpetrated against private landowners. Nevertheless, expelling a farmer from his land so it could be handed over to a tribe of Bible-thumpers was a minor violation compared to some of the practices he'd heard of. The Party had been overthrown in one final night of mass civil disobedience and well-planned acts of destruction by underground groups, but the problems it had created hadn't gone with it. "So what did Noel want with a solicitor?"

"He kept coming back, that man, after we said we wouldn't go. Said he'd have us evicted like so many cattle. Said everyone round here would be glad to see us go, that we were Party, so we'd best make it easy for ourselves. Dad wasn't having none of that. We have rights, he said. He went and found a solicitor who'd help us. Seeing as how we'd been here so long, we're entitled to appeal to the court for a ruling of post-acquisition compensation. Means we'd have to pay the farmer whose land it was. But that way we wouldn't have to leave. It would cost us plenty. We'd have to work hard to raise that much money, but we ain't afraid of hard work."

"I see." Greg looked down at the broken sections of fence, understanding now what had really happened here. "What is this man's name, the one who wants you off?"

"Richard Townsend, he's a property developer lives in Oakham."

"You think Townsend had my father run down?" Eleanor asked. They were sitting out on the farmhouse's newly-laid patio, looking across the southern branch of Rutland Water. Citrus groves covered the peninsula's slope on both sides of the house's grounds, the young trees fluttering their silky verdant leaves in the breeze. Phalanxes of swans and signets glided past on the dark water, their serenity only occasionally broken by a speeding windsurfer.

"It's the obvious conclusion," Greg said bitterly. "Noel

was the centre of opposition, the one they all follow. Without him they might just keep the legal challenge going, but their heart won't be in it. For all his flaws, he was bloody charismatic."

"You mean intimidating."

"Call it what you like; he was the one they looked to. And now..."

She closed her eyes, shuddering. "He won't last another day, Greg. I don't think it would make any difference now even if we could get him into hospital."

She hadn't talked much about her father's condition since they had arrived back at the farmhouse at midday. The morning's events were taking time to assimilate. She had done what she could with the medicines in the first-aid kit, easing the worst of his pain. He had pretended indifference when she said she would return later. It didn't convince anyone. Her ambivalence was along way from being resolved. It had been a very wide rift.

"Townsend won't have done it personally," Greg said. "There'll be a perfect alibi with plenty of witnesses while whoever he hired drove the car. But he won't be able to hide guilt from me during the interview."

"That won't work, darling," she said sadly. "It still takes a lot for a jury to be convinced by a psychic's evidence. And you're hardly impartial in this case. A novice barrister on her first case would have you thrown out of court."

"Okay. I accept that. We need some solid evidence to convict him."

"Where are you going to get that from? You don't even really know for certain that it was Townsend. You can hardly interrogate him privately and then tell the police what he's done and ask them to follow it up."

"The car is evidence," Greg said. "Andy called in an official hit-and-run report from Egleton's phonebox. I'll start with that."

Greg left Eleanor at the kibbutz next morning, and drove on into Oakham. It had been a couple of years since he'd visited the police station. The desk sergeant reacted with a stoicism verging on contempt when Greg asked him what progress had been made on the hit-and-run. "I'll check the file for you, but don't expect too much."

"The man it hit is my father-in-law. He's going to die from the injuries."

A squirt of information coloured the sergeant's desktop terminal cube with flecks of light. "Sorry, sir. Whoever reported the incident didn't know what the vehicle was, nor when it happened. If we don't have anything to go on, we can't make enquiries. There's nothing to ask."

"Did anyone even go out there and check? He's dying! The driver of that vehicle has killed him."

The sergeant did manage to look reasonably embarrassed. "The nature of the injuries wasn't disclosed at the time, sir. It's not down here."

"Would it have made a difference?"

"The case would have been graded accordingly."

"Graded? What the fuck is graded?"

"We would have given the incident a higher priority, sir."

Greg bit back on his immediate reply. Shouting at the ranks wasn't going to solve anything – it was the gen-

erals not the squaddies who decide the campaign strategy. He paused, took a breath. "What about forensic? There are all sorts of marks out there, even some paint off the bodywork. Any decent forensic lab would be able to match the paint type with the manufacturer, at least get an idea of what kind of vehicle they were driving. Then you could start asking if anyone saw it."

"Yes, sir. Was the gentleman insured?"

"For what?"

"Crime investigation finance. It's becoming more necessary these days. Most companies offer it as part of their employment package along with health cover, pension, housing guarantee, that kind of thing. You see, the sort of investigation you're talking about launching will absorb a lot of our resources. The Rutland force has only limited civic funds. To be honest with you, successfully tracing the driver would be a long shot. The chief has to focus his budget on areas which have a good probability of bringing positive results."

"I don't believe this. He's a *kibbutznik*, he's not employed by some big-shot corporation. The only money they have comes from selling eggs at the market. But that doesn't mean he's not a citizen; he's entitled to time and attention from the police."

"Sorry, sir. I'm not trying to discourage you, just telling you the way it is these days. I don't want you to leave here with false hopes of us being able to launch a man-hunt for the driver. And even if we did, a hit-and-run incident without a witness..." He shook his head. "Just about zero conviction rate."

"I can pay," Greg said. He pulled out his platinum Event Horizon card. "Just show me what I have to sign, and get that bloody forensic team out there."

"It's Sunday, sir. The assigned case officer won't be in until tomorrow, I'm afraid. You'll have to speak with him about upgrading the investigation status."

Greg wondered if they would have the resources to investigate a member of the public punching an officer inside the station. Tempting to find out.

"There are private forensic laboratories, sir," the desk sergeant said. "We have an approved list if you'd like to use one. Some of them are very good."

It was no good shouting. Greg could see he was trying to be helpful, after a fashion. At which point Amanda Patterson called out his name.

Greg put the two pints of Riddles County down on the table. Mike Wilson gave his glass a wary look.

"Cheers," Greg said. After they had got back from the Sullivan bungalow, he had waited outside the police station until the insurance agent had come out, then invited him for a quiet drink at the Wheatsheaf pub just round the corner. So far, Wilson was curious enough not to offer resistance, but he was clearly worried.

"You can relax," Greg told him. "I used to be a private eye. I've worked on corporate cases before. I understand the need for discretion at times like this."

"Uh huh." Mike took a sip of his beer.

"I know who did it." From a psychic perspective, the jolt of surprise flashing into Wilson's mind was quite amus-

ing. He only just managed to avoid it triggering a physical jerk. That spoke of good self-control. Greg wasn't surprised at that, it confirmed several things he had speculated about the man.

"Who? We didn't see anyone who matched that bloody genome image."

Greg folded his arms and smiled. "You don't need to know."

"Why the hell not?"

"I don't want them convicted."

"I see."

"Which is the same reason you were given this investigation, isn't it? Keep an eye on Amanda. Wise move by your company. I worked with her before. She's a smart girl. And a very good police officer. She won't make compromises."

"And you will?"

"When it suits me. And this certainly does."

"Crescent Insurance would be happy to consider an adequate remuneration for the time you've spent advising Oakham CID."

"You should research more. I'm already rich."

"What then?"

"Tell me what line of investigation Crescent wants avoiding, and I'll see if we can help each other."

Wilson took a slow sip, and eased back into his chair. "Okay. I'm actually on secondment to Crescent; my employer is Hothouse."

"Byrne Tyler's agency?"

"Yeah. Look, showbiz is not pretty, okay? We deal with images, illusions. That's what we sell: characters larger than life. To the general public, Byrne is some hot young chunk of meat with a six-pack stomach and the devil's smile. In the dramas all he's got to do is show off that bod in some tough action sequences and blow away bad guys with his big gun. In real life we portray him as an *It Guy*; he goes to all the best parties, he dates the most beautiful actresses and models, he's friends with the older, real celebrities. That's what we're promoting here, the more he's in the 'casts, the more 'castworthy' he is. Doesn't matter if it's private-life gossip, or reviews for his latest pile of interactive shit. We put him out there and shine a light on him for everyone to idolize and buy every tie-in funny-coloured chocolate bar we can slam at them. We make money, and Byrne gets a bigger apartment and a better nose job. Unfortunately, in reality, he's some half-wit sink-estate boy from Walthamstow we uprooted and dropped in front of the cameras. That's a shock to anyone's system. Certainly for him it was. He couldn't tell where the image stopped and life began. He's got a syntho habit, a dream-punch habit, a sweet&sour habit... he even uses crack, for Christ's sake; he can barely remember his one-word catchphrase, and his autograph isn't in joined-up writing. What I'm saying is, he needs – needed – a lot of agency management and handling to cope with his new existence, right down to potty-training level."

"You didn't like him."

"I've never met him. Like I said, this is showbusiness, with the emphasis on business. Byrne Tyler was an investment on Hothouse's part. And it was starting to go

ripe. A year ago he was living on credit, and his career was nose-diving. Well, even that's okay. It's not exactly the first time that's happened to a celeb. We know how to handle that. We got him partway through detox therapy, paired him up with the gorgeous Tamzin, and together they're riding high. Bingo, we're back on track, he's being offered new interactives, she's getting runway assignments for the bigger couture houses."

"So you wrote a happy ending. So what's the problem?"

"The problem is the middle of the story. When his cash was low and no studio would touch him, he earned his living the oldest way you can. All those trophy wives who's husbands are so decrepit they can't even take Laynon any more. Single trust-fund babes, except at their age they aren't babes any longer. Even supermodels who wanted a serious no-comesbacks, no-involvement shagging one night. Tyler serviced them all."

"Let me guess. You pimped him."

"Our investment was going negative. We pointed people in the right direction. Nobody got hurt. It paid off."

"Except now he's dead. And he recorded all those women on that big waterbed of his."

"Stupid little prick." Wilson nodded remorsefully. "Was it one of them, some husband or boyfriend who found out?"

"No. You're in the clear."

"Hardly. Amanda Patterson is going to start phoning round that goddamn list he left behind. Look, he beds 20 rich and famous girls, and he's a superstud, a hero to the lads. Thirty and he's unbelievable... how the hell did he manage that? Fifty of the richest women in Europe night after night, and damn right nobody'll believe it can happen. There's going to be rumours; the media will start scratching round. We won't be able to keep a lid on it."

"Perfect," Greg said. "I can deliver someone who can take the rap for Tyler's death. Amanda will stop phoning your list, and go after him instead. The Tyler case will be closed, and the women involved can quietly apply to the police for the recordings to be wiped under the privacy act."

"Who is it?"

"A nasty little man called Richard Townsend."

"Never heard of him."

"No reason you should. But I'm going to need a motive to link him in with Tyler. What other failings did our late celebrity have?"

Gabriel Thompson was one of Greg's oldest friends, from his army days. Morgan Walshaw he knew pretty well, handling security for the biggest company there was: Event Horizon. Trustworthy and competent at exactly the level Greg needed. It helped that the two of them had taken a shine to each other after meeting on one of Greg's cases. They'd moved in together a few months later, living in a grand old terrace house in Stamford.

Greg phoned them as soon as he got back from his drink with Mike Wilson. They arrived together at the farmhouse as the sun was sinking behind Berrybut spiny on the far shore. Gabriel helped with Christine's bathtime, while Greg and Morgan tackled the menu from the Chinese take-away in Mill Street.

They wound up sitting in the conservatory with the

cartons from the take-away on the big cedar table. Pink light drained away from the clouds bridging the horizon, leaving a quiescent gloaming in its wake.

"I need a safeguard before I agree to this," Morgan said after Greg had finished talking. "I appreciate there's a lot of circumstantial evidence that Townsend had Noel Broady run down, but we don't know for certain."

"I'll get myself in on the preliminary interview," Greg said. "If I can see he's guilty of paying someone to run Noel over, will that be enough for you?"

"Yes," Morgan said. "I'll accept your word."

"If he's not?" Gabriel asked archly.

"Then we collapse the deal. It'll leave a nasty smell, but at least he walks away."

"Okay," she said. "So what's the link between him and Tyler?"

"Hothouse set up a virtual company for Tyler to sell his action dramas and interactives. I think there's even a best-of compilation from *Marina Days*."

"Compelling stuff," Gabriel muttered.

"Yeah, anyway. This company is called Firedrake, and Mike Wilson has agreed to sell Hothouse's half share. It's only a pound New Sterling, so they don't exactly lose out. All we have to do is convince Townsend to buy it, and back-date the agreement."

"Why?" Morgan asked.

"Tyler wasn't quite as stupid as you'd think. He was using the site to sell bootleg memox crystals of his own stuff. Any orders you place on the Firedrake site are supposed to go to the distribution company that's contracted to deal with all Hothouse's clients. Tyler, the clever little sod, rigged the site so that two thirds of the orders are redirected to a bootlegging operation that he's got an arrangement with. That way, instead of getting his half-percent royalty payment from the cover price of the genuine crystal, he gets 50 per cent of the price from the bootleg. Cash only, non-taxable. Hothouse found out about it a month ago, and confronted Tyler. He claimed he knew nothing, and that some hotrod had hacked into the site and loaded the diversion instructions. As his engagement to Tamzin was starting to produce results, Hothouse overlooked it, and sorted the site out."

"So whoever his partner in Firedrake is, they're being ripped off by Tyler," Eleanor said. "Anyone examining the Firedrake site order log and comparing it to the legitimate distribution company's orders will see the missing 60 per cent straight away. The partner in Firedrake will have a justifiable grudge against Tyler."

"What that partner will do is have Tyler's apartment broken into, and steal a painting that is of equal worth to the missing money. Unfortunately, Tyler was at home when the burglary happened, there was a brief struggle, and he got pushed downstairs. That makes whoever received the stolen painting an accessory to murder. It'll be the physical proof Amanda needs to nail him."

"Can you get us a painting out of the apartment?" Gabriel asked.

"I think so," Greg said. "I reviewed the Macmillan art encyclopedia database. We got lucky, the most valuable piece Tyler owns is also the smallest one. It should be

easy enough to lift it."

"When do you want to start?" Morgan asked.

"Right away. See if you can get an appointment with Townsend tomorrow morning. Gabriel, you're going to be the accountant. You'll have to hire an office for us in Peterborough. It needs to be ready by Tuesday at the latest. Suzi will give you a hand."

"Suzi? You're kidding!"

"No way. I'm going to bring her in as your company's secretary. She'll be perfect as the courier for the swap – Townsend won't argue with her."

"Jesus wept. Okay, if you say so."

"What about the Firedrake site?" Morgan asked. "Won't Townsend be suspicious of me marketing the interactives of a dead celebrity?"

"You won't be selling Tyler's products," Greg said. "I've got Royan designing a completely new architecture for us; from midnight, Firedrake will be selling software products and obscure music acts. Once Townsend has bought in, we'll change it back."

Gabriel gave her glass of beer a quizzical glance, then smiled softly. "Sounds good to me."

Greg had been right about Amanda Patterson – she was a first-rate detective. As soon as Hugh Snell confirmed the McCarthy was a fake she redirected her team's effort to produce maximum results. Every art house and auctioneer in the country was squirted an immediate notification about the painting, and CID staff were told to get in touch with known fences and dealers. A reward was mentioned.

Of course, as Townsend was blissfully unaware he had anything to hide, Sotheby's in Stamford got back to Amanda less than two hours later. Richard Townsend was identified.

"Not the person who actually pushed Tyler," she said regretfully, as she compared his picture with the genome visualization. An undercover team was assigned to keep Townsend under surveillance.

Greg watched as she turned her team to establishing the link between Tyler and Townsend. It was the accountant who tracked down the partnership in Firedrake. After that it was plain sailing. The accountant worked well with Alison, running analysis programs through the virtual company's records. The distribution company made their order logs available.

By ten o'clock that evening they had it all worked out. Byrne Tyler was ripping off his Firedrake partner Townsend, who discovered what was happening. Knowing the money would never be paid over, a burglar was hired for a custom theft. But there had been a flaw. Byrne Tyler was awake when the break-in occurred. There must have been a struggle.

Amanda took the case to Vernon at quarter past ten. He reviewed it, and authorized the arrest warrant.

Throughout the interview with Townsend, Greg had felt as if he was the one on trial. Not so far from the truth. He was the one who had brought them all together. The strain was twisting him up inside, having to wait patiently while Amanda asked questions which Townsend

didn't understand, let alone have answers for. Finally, he could ask the one question that counted.

Physically, Townsend froze up. His hands gripped the armrests, sweat glistened on his brow as his mouth hung open. In his mind, horror and fright rose like ghouls to contaminate every thought.

"Guilty," Greg said. He hoped he hadn't sagged at the release of his own tension.

"Thank you, Mr Mandel," Amanda said.

It was the tone which alarmed Greg. He hadn't been paying attention to the detective. Now he could sense the doubts rippling through her mind. She held his gaze steadily, and said: "I think we both need to take a break now. No doubt you'd like to consult with your solicitor, Mr Townsend. Interview suspended." She switched the AV deck off. "Greg, a word, please."

"Sure."

As they left the interview room a frantic Townsend was whispering furiously to Jodie Dobson. Amanda went straight downstairs and out into the station's car park. She rounded on Greg. "What the hell is going on?"

"You were right about him, my question confirmed that."

"Oh, bollocks, Greg. He doesn't have a clue what's going on."

"He's guilty. I swear it, Amanda."

"Yeah?" She dug in her pocket and pulled out a cigarette.

"I thought they were illegal?"

"No. That's a common mistake. Usage just prohibits you from claiming National Health Service treatment. If you chose to make yourself ill, don't expect the state to pay to make you better. So given that smoking actually makes it illegal to go to an NHS hospital, it's easy to see how confused people can get over the actual wording of the law. And it suits the government to encourage that confusion."

"Are we talking in metaphors here?"

"I don't know, Greg. I don't know what's metaphor, what's confusion, and what's truth. But I'm bloody sure Townsend didn't have anything to do with Tyler's death. Detective's instinct, remember."

"The evidence points straight at him."

"Yes. With amazing clarity. Funny how that all fell together yesterday. Why yesterday? Why didn't we have it before?"

"We only discovered the painting had been taken yesterday."

"So we did. No, actually, *you* did. On the third visit. What's the matter, Greg – psychic power not what it used to be?"

"It's not an exact science."

"No, it isn't. But you're right. We're lucky to discover the painting. After all, it must have been stolen during a burglary, and that burglary must have been last Wednesday night. Because it couldn't have been taken afterwards; no one else has been alone in Tyler's apartment since then, have they Greg? Alone downstairs while I was taking a stupid call from Mike bloody Wilson."

Greg spread his arms, trying not to show how alarmed he was getting. "A few seconds."

"How long does it take to switch something that small?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Neither does Richard Townsend. He claims he only received that painting yesterday."

"He claims. Do you think Alan O'Hagen can confirm that?"

"You know as well as I do I'll never get to ask that question. But my investigation only took off once every piece of the puzzle was dumped into Townsend's hands for me to find." She dropped the half-smoked cigarette and crunched it under her foot. "What the hell happened to you, Greg? You, I thought you, of all people were trustworthy. For Christ's sake, you fought the PSP for a decade while people like me hid behind our desks. This is the world you were fighting for. Are you surprised it's not perfection? Is that it? Do you have so little faith in the police, in me, that you have to fabricate all this crap to set up an innocent man? Who the hell are you protecting, Greg?"

"Amanda, I promise you, Townsend is not innocent. He is responsible for someone's death."

"But not Tyler. If I asked that in the interview room and he said no, what would you tell me, Greg? Would you tell me he's lying?"

"You have all the evidence you need. It will hold together in court without my testimony. He's an accessory to murder. He's responsible."

"And you couldn't prove it? Not for the real crime. That's it, isn't it? No proof. So you set him up for this."

Greg remained silent, wondering where all this shame he was suddenly feeling was coming from.

"Fine, Greg," she said. "You got your man. But what about Tyler's killer. He's still walking around loose. He got away with it, with murder. Tyler might not have been the best person in the world, but surely he deserves better than us turning our backs on him?"

"Tyler wasn't murdered. It was a genuine accident. Although, if he hadn't been the person he was, it wouldn't have happened."

"What do you mean?"

Greg slowly took his cybofax from his jacket pocket, and flipped it open. The face of Tyler's killer looked out blankly from the screen. Greg typed in a few simple instructions, altering the characteristics age-projection program. The face evolved again, but not running its standard 18-to-80 cycle. This time it went back eight years. Daniel Sullivan stared out at Amanda.

"Oh, fuck," she whispered.

"He found out that Tyler was blackmailing his sister into having sex," Greg said. "So that night he sneaked into the Ingalo's boot. He must have got in through the cloakroom window, probably even saw them on the bed together. Tyler heard him moving around and went to investigate. Daniel pushed him. A little boy incensed at what he'd seen happen to the sister he loved."

"And she covered for him," Amanda said. "Turned down the air conditioning, took the crystal from the AV deck, wiped his fingerprints, then drove him home."

"Yeah."

"You knew it all the minute you walked into the bungalow, didn't you?"

"That poor kid was so scared I'm just surprised no one else noticed him."

"I need another cigarette."

"You shouldn't. They'll kill you." He waited to see what she'd do.

She took the packet of 20 from her pocket, and after a long moment handed them to him. "You keep them, and don't tell the health police, huh?"

"I don't have time right now. I have to organize a funeral."

"Anyone I know?"

"My father-in-law. He died after a hit-and-run."

Amanda paused for a moment. "Take care, Greg."

"And you." He got into the Ranger, and drove out of the station car park. A last glance in the rear-view mirror showed him Amanda squaring her shoulders, then marching back into the station.

Peter F. Hamilton's previous stories in *Interzone* were "Adam's Gene" (issue 75), "Eat Reecebread" (with Graham Joyce, issue 86) and "Escape Route" (issue 121). The above new short novel is related to his trilogy about futuristic investigator Greg Mandel, *Mindstar Rising* (1993), *A Quantum Murder* (1994) and *The Nano Flower* (1995). Born in 1960, he continues to live in England's smallest county, Rutland.

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Photography by Chris Cuffaro

One of the most outspoken and daring writers alive today, Harlan Ellison has written or edited 75 books, more than 1,700 stories, essays and articles, two dozen teleplays and a dozen motion pictures spanning the entire artistic spectrum. Perhaps best known for his works of speculative fiction, which include the classic *Dangerous Visions* anthologies he conceived of and edited, he has won the Hugo award eight-and-a-half times, the Nebula award three times, the Bram Stoker award five times and the World Fantasy Lifetime Achievement award.

You've been involved with science fiction in some form or fashion for more than five decades, and over the years have written some of that genre's most influential works. But you reject the moniker of "science-fiction writer." Why is that?

I am first of all not a science-fiction writer, as most of the people within the science-fiction world will tell you. You see, that's the thing. I have the worst of both possible worlds. On the one side, I do fiction that is more like Kafka or Poe. I mean, that's what I write. I write, I suppose, what the Latin Americans call magic realism. That's a lot closer to what I write. Every once in a while I'll do a story that has one of those pieces of science-fiction furniture in it, a mutant or telepathy or a future society – but I am not ever a science-fiction writer. I'm just a writer who occasionally happens to do science fiction. Most of my work is way outside the field, yet out-

The EVENT that is his LIFE

Harlan Ellison
interviewed by
Jayme Lynn Blaschke

side the field I am tagged with that, so my books are reviewed in with the rockets and spacemen section. Inside the field I am treated as if I am some kind of parvenu or some kind of idiot because I don't write science fiction. I mean I don't write Greg Bear, Greg Benford, William Gibson kind of stuff. I'm not a technocrat. And if you were to talk to Fred Pohl, he would tell you instantly I'm not a science-fiction writer. It's like a guy standing on a street corner saying, "I'm not a rapist. I swear I'm not a rapist." And people say, "Well, if he's not a rapist, why does he keep saying he's not a rapist?" They cannot seem to understand the simple reasoning behind not being called a science-fiction writer. They just don't get it.

So how is it that you've become so closely associated with the genre?

You've got to understand, when I was a kid, I was a science-fiction fan.

When my father died in '49, we moved from a small town called Painesville to Cleveland. I was a very very clever kid, a smart kid, but I didn't really have anybody to talk to or hang out with, so I got involved with a science-fiction fan club in Cleveland and helped found the Cleveland Science Fiction Society. That was way back in 1950. When I gravitated toward writing, which I always wanted to do in any case, doing science fiction seemed the normal thing to do.

But apart from attending a few conventions every year, you have little to do with fandom these days. You've even said in the past that you despise your readers. What was that all about?

Ed Bryant did an interview with me about eight or nine years ago. Ed and I are old friends, so I speak to him very freely. He said, "You seem to have a love-hate relationship with your readers." And I said, "Well, I came to understand at a very primal level a long, long time ago that one must not only ignore your audience, you must despise them." And of course that put the cat among the pigeons. Everybody went straight up the flue on that one. And it's my fault, because I was imprecise. That wasn't a good word to use. What I meant was "not pay any attention to." Not have any care about what they think. And my explanation for that is that I looked at writers like Isaac Asimov, who was one of my closest friends for 40 years. Isaac cared what his audience thought. He loved his fans and always tried to accommodate them, which meant that a lot of the things he might have written that were a lot more cutting-edge – that were a lot further out there, a lot more daring – Isaac never did. Because he just was busy doing other things.

So how does this relate to your own writing?

I think you can't hit a moving target. As a writer, I don't want to be in the same place twice. I don't want to chew my cud. I don't want to have to spit out and regurgitate the same stuff again. I always try to keep ahead of my own abilities as good or as bad as they are, and I find this annoys my audience. I did "Repent Harlequin, Said the Ticktock Man," of which everybody at the time said, "Oh, nobody's going to like this." Well, it won the Hugo and was the first short story ever to win a Nebula. So then I did "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" and everybody panned it. They said, "Oh no, this is not nearly as good as 'Repent, Harlequin,'" which they had said was shit to begin with,

right? All of the sudden "Repent, Harlequin" was a classic, so now "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" was terrible. Well, when "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" won the Hugo, all of the sudden it became the icon. If you listen to your audience, you will first go crazy as a soup sandwich, and you will always wind up doing something other than what your muse orders you to.

The U.S. is currently experiencing something of a Harlan Ellison renaissance, with the ongoing Edgeworks series of books doing quite an impressive job of packaging and reissuing your out-of-print material. In spite of this, you're quite hard to find in British bookstores.

I don't know why I'm not published in Britain right now. The funny thing is, I'm very popular in Russia at the moment. Earlier this year a publisher brought out a huge unauthorized collection of my work, which they were able to do under the Russian copyright thing because they didn't subscribe to it until something like 1971, so they could take anything from before 1971 of mine and they brought out this book. My actual Russian publisher was so pissed off he said we want to do a major Ellison revival here and do big stuff with it. They published a huge three-volume thing called *The Worlds of Harlan Ellison* and it was the best-seller for that publisher in Russia. I'm also pretty good in France. In France they're just starting up a new programme of my work. I do well in many countries, but England... I dunno.

Why do you think that is? Do you not translate well to British tastes?

The only clue I've gotten is this: Years ago – and it was the last book they published – they did *Shatterday* in hardcover. *Shatterday* was a book that had introductions to the stories. I got a call from the editor, and he said, "Do you mind if we don't publish the introductions to these stories?" I said I don't know whether I minded. Why would you not want to? He said, "Well, you know they're terribly revelatory. They reveal a lot about you. They talk a lot about the way you think and where you come from, and they're very personal." And I said, "Yes, and this is not good because...?" And he said, "Well, we British are a little more reserved than that, and I'm afraid they'll think you're a little too brash, a little too outspoken." Well, they didn't publish the stuff, and my readers over there, many of them were very annoyed because they thought they were going to get the full book and

they didn't. But this has happened a number of times where my writing, which is very different from the way most British writing is done, is tagged too ebullient, or too brash, or too outspoken or too coarse or whatever the fuck it is.

Your written work, your short fiction, often seems to have a consistent moral undercurrent. Not necessarily religious, and perhaps a bit skewed at times, but it's there. What influence does your personal morality have on your writing?

Well, I will answer that in a second, but you used the wrong word. I don't give a shit for morality. What I have in my stories is ethics. Ethics and morality are very different cups of tea. I adhere to a very strict rigour of personal ethics and I demand it of those around me as well. Which is not to say that I am not flawed, that I don't make mistakes, that I don't out of either ignorance or misguidedness do something that is not as ethical as I would wish it to be. But when I learn of my mistakes, I am prepared to take the bone for them.

Okay, ethics, not morality. Please explain.

I operate by a code that makes me responsible for what I do, makes me definitely, directly, genuinely responsible. I am precisely the kind of person I made myself out to be. You will never hear me whine that "Oh, gee, my mommy locked me in the basement when I was a kid so therefore I have to become a cannibal like Jeffrey Dahmer." I am out there standing behind whatever it is I say and whatever it is I do. If you go looking for me, you will find me – as opposed to these kind of people that play *The Late George Apley* game.* [Footnote: *Reference to a novel by John P. Marquand, about an outwardly respectable businessman who lives a lie – Editor.] There is nothing hypocritical about me. I don't do that. When I tell you somebody is a scumbag, I tell them that to their face. But when I tell you somebody is a good guy, I would tell them that to their face, too. I do not play the game of social propriety. This is another thing that annoys people a lot, that gets me a lot of bad press, because I just can't be politic. I never learned how to do that and I don't like doing that. I think it's false. I think it's distrustful. I speak my mind, as awkward as it may be. I could be wrong, but if I think something is the truth, that's the way I express it. Then I think I can't go wrong.

Let's test that ethical system. What's

the worst thing you've ever done?

There are things that I have done that would stun a police dog if I spoke of them, so obviously I'm not going to speak of them. My friends know, and my wife knows, and they seem to forgive me. That's the interesting thing. The things that I would pillory myself for having done, where I would say "Shit, I never really should have done that," they will all say "But you had to do that because blah blah blah..."

Such as?

I'll give you a for instance. I did a thing that I thought was wrong. No one else thought it was wrong, but I thought it was wrong. Prior to White Wolf getting the rights to do all of the books that they're releasing as *Edgeworks*, I had a verbal deal with a wonderful, wonderful woman, a good friend of mine named Pam Pia. And Pam Pia worked for Longmeadow Press, the publishing arm of Waldenbooks, the book chain. Pam is a dear woman and a good editor, and she wanted all these books. They were not going to pay a lot of money for them because it was a start-up company and they didn't have a lot of money despite the fact that Waldenbooks has all the money in the universe. But I said OK we would do it, and we started forward doing it. At just about that moment, here came this offer from White Wolf with an enormous amount of money. And I would have complete control of the cover art, and the editorial. I mean it was a really terrific package. It couldn't be any better. Well, I hadn't signed a contract with Longmeadow, and I was not actually committed, but I was committed in my mind, because I had given my word. I anguished over it for almost two weeks while everybody sat and waited, and I could've blown the whole damn thing. Everybody said the same thing to me, including Pam Pia. She called me and said "Harlan, you've got to take the deal with White Wolf. You've got to." And I said "Pam, I gave you my word." She said "That's all right. It's not going to hurt me any." And I said, "That's not the point. The point is that ethically, I gave my word and I'm having a hard time reconciling it." Finally, I acquiesced. And I acquiesced and I did it and I begged out with Pam and I told her I would do another book with her for a third the price of what they would ordinarily have paid for a book of mine. What happened was, of course, Longmeadow went out of business and we never did anything. But I still think, even to this day, that what I did was unethi-

cal. If you ask me, this is a bad thing I did. And I'm not trying to tell you that it's justified in any way because of circumstances. What I'm saying is the things I've done that are worse than that, that are *really* bad, I ain't gonna tell you.

Let's balance the karma: What's the best thing you've ever done?

Well, I don't know if its the best, but the most recent is I fought for three years to get A. E. van Vogt the (Science Fiction/Fantasy Writers of Amer-

would've been given to van Vogt. He was the biggest of the big in this field, and for them to ignore that, and treat him like a spent force, like an old man, like a throwaway, was criminal to me.

So what happened then?

They said, "Well, we'll talk about it. We'll see." They played that shit with me, and I put up with it for almost two years, letting them jerk me around. Finally I just couldn't take it any more. I called them and I said,

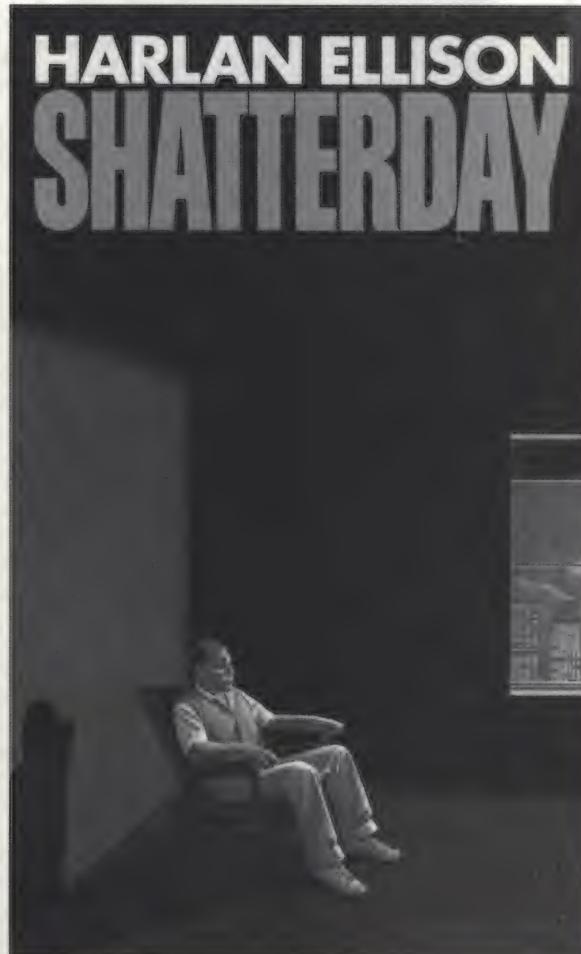
"Look, I'm going on television, where I do my commentaries on the SciFi Channel, on *SciFi Buzz*, and I'm going to do one of my *Harlan Ellison's Watching* commentaries about this, and I'm going to urge people to start writing to SFWA, to the officers, and demanding that these people get their awards." Well, they got very arrogant, very high-handed and wouldn't do a thing about it. And finally I went on the air, and the minute I did it they squealed like stuck pigs. And of course, not liking the message, the messenger became the evil guy. And I caught more of the shit that I'm always catching. That's okay. I'm used to catching shit, so it doesn't bother me. It doesn't bother me in the least. I can fight back perfectly well, and I didn't stop. I did four more. And A. E. van Vogt got his award. He got it because I embarrassed them, I humiliated them. That was a real good thing. I was on the side of the angels.

*For your first book, *Web of the City*, you passed yourself off as a 17-year-old Italian kid and spent ten weeks running with the Barons gang in Brooklyn. Would something like that be possible today?*

What, for me to pass myself off as a 17-year-old?

I really should have seen that one coming! How about, "Would infiltrating a gang as research for a book be possible for someone today?"

Well, it's not the kind of thing that's done now. The only kind of person who does that is George Plimpton, who'll go three rounds with Muhammad Ali to be able to write about what it's like. There was also still a very strong Hemingway influence among writers back then. A lot of us grew up during those days when Hemingway was a great icon, and he said you should never write what you don't know. I was driving a dynamite truck when I



ica) Grand Master Award. He had been passed over for decades on this thing. I got the backing of all kinds of ex-presidents of SFWA and ex-winners of the Grand Master award from Jack Williamson on down, and I tried desperately to get it done. But because of the politics, because of the pettiness of much of this genre, they would not give it to him. They just would not give it to him. And then the man developed Alzheimer's and he could barely... But he was a dear sweet man, and he wrote stuff that is absolutely seminal. If not seminal then at least germinal in this field. If the Grand Master award had been given out in say, 1950 or '51, before Arthur C. Clarke or Robert Heinlein or Ray Bradbury or Isaac Asimov got it, it

was 14 years old in North Carolina. I've worked on tuna boats and in logging camps and I worked in a carnival. I did all that kind of shit, because that was what the image was of a writer. Every book you picked up, everybody had a background like Jack London for chrissake. And so I thought that's what you had to do. I don't think that today that's the kind of thing that'll happen. We've lost a lot of the sense of adventure, a lot of the sense of danger, and also there aren't the venues any more. I mean, you can't go out hitch-hiking. I hitch-hiked across this country five or six times. I rode the rails. I lived in hobo camps. Those things don't exist any more. What exists now is a very mechanized, technocratic world in which there are rules and regulations at every stop. I suppose that's why a lot of people find adventure on the Internet. That's their idea of being interactive. My idea of being interactive is going on out and doing it on the street. Anybody who would do it would be a remarkable kind of person with a great flair for life and would be somebody I would love to meet.

And this is what you tell aspiring writers?

I must've lectured at 3,000 universities, all over the world, including the London School of Economics, and Yale and Harvard. Invariably at every single public presentation someone will come up to me the way Willy Loman asked his brother Ben in *Death of a Salesman*, "Ben, Ben what's the secret? What's the secret?" and Ben would say "Diamonds, Willy. Diamonds." Well, they come up and ask me, "What's the secret of success? How do you make something of yourself?" And I give them the secret. There is only one secret, and the secret is this: Anybody can become a writer. If you look at bad writers like Judith Krantz or John Grisham, and you look at the crap that they write, you realize that things that live in a petri dish for chrissake can become a writer. The trick is not *becoming* a writer – the trick is *staying* a writer. Day after month after year after story after book. That's the secret. And if you can do that and produce a body of work, no matter how large or small it is, that is true and can pull the plough, then you're a writer. If you are not prepared to spend your life doing that, then for chrissake don't do it.

What else do you tell them when they want writing advice?

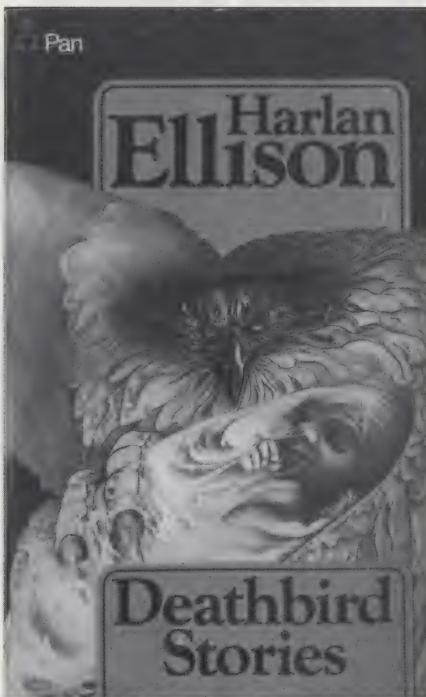
I say, "I'm going to give you the best advice you've ever had. The advice is this: Go become a plumber." And they

laugh, because they think I'm kidding, but I'm not kidding. That's not a euphemism. Go become a plumber. Or learn electrical wiring. In the long run, there are very few books in the history of literature that have truly altered the world in any way. Maybe *The Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides, maybe the *Analects of Confucius*, maybe *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In every 500 years there's one or two books that alter the course of human

turer who lived at the peak of his macho ability and then finally blew his brains out with an over-and-under shotgun in Wyoming. And Zola is only known for the Dreyfuss case. But I think there are some writers – as there are some politicians, there are some adventurers, there are some scientists – whose lives, apart from their achievements, their lives themselves are eventful. They live life more fully, they live life with a greater commitment. Now I am not extending that to me. Please be careful when you write this. I do not want people to think I am demonstrating that kind of hubris. I'm trying to answer your question as honestly as I can, and I don't think I can get any closer to it than that.

Do you have any idea why this has come to pass in your life?

All my life has been an event. I don't know at what point the persona separated from the body of work, but I think that in fact they didn't. I think that it's fairly obvious if you read the stuff I write, there is the same – well, they used to accuse me of writing at the top of my lungs. That's what John Clute wrote. He said Ellison can't write in any way except at the top of his lungs. Well, that's not true. If you read "Jeffty is Five" or "Grail" or any stories like that, you'll discover that they're written in a much quieter tone. I bring the same passion, the same commitment, the same determination not to flinch and turn away from the abyss, to my work that I do to my life. I marched with Martin Luther King from Selma to Montgomery. I worked with Cesar Chavez in the Coachella Valley on the grapefruit strike. I have taken on the KKK, I spent over a thousand actual hours lecturing for the Equal Rights Amendment during the time we were trying to get it through the senate. I care about what I do, I believe in what I do and that extends to my writing. And I guess it seeps through and one's nature splits off, and becomes your doppelganger. There are some people who just live their lives at a higher degree of activity or a greater level of commitment or something, and it's possible that I'm one of those. I don't know. On the other hand, it may be something just as cheap as self-aggrandizement. I don't know. I'm not smart enough to know what the hell motivates it. So I can't answer the question any better than that. I wish I could. I don't know when who I am either transcended or split off and ran alongside, or whatever, what it is what I do for a living. But I think without the one, the other doesn't mean anything.



civilization. If the truth be told, I think it is just as noble and in fact probably a lot nobler to be a good plumber. Because I've done 70 books, people go, "God, you're so prolific." And I say, "What do you mean prolific? I've been doing it for 42 years, and I've done 70 books. That's what I do. It's a full-time job. If I were a plumber, and I had unclogged 10,000 toilets, would you say to me 'You're a prolific plumber?'" No, people just don't equate the two, but I gotta tell you, when your toilet overflows, you do not need Dostoevsky to come into your house.

When did Harlan Ellison the writer become Harlan Ellison the event?

I don't know. I've studied the lives of a number of different writers – Emile Zola, Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway. These were people who wrote important things, but when you talk about them, people know that Scott Fitzgerald sort of was the king of the Roaring '20s and danced his way through that whole period of bootleg gin and his wife wound up in a madhouse. People know Hemingway was a great adven-

All the Roads to Heaven

Jean-Claude Dunyach

“**Y**ou’ll get used to it,” Wander grumbled as he put his machete away.

He had ripped the cocoon open, with a slash two yards long – the ceramic blade was encrusted with synthetic diamonds, the only material resistant enough to cut through the envelope, hardened as it was by the trip down through the atmosphere. Lutz cautiously walked closer. He watched as Wander emptied a can of napalm onto the black-veined green organs visible through the jagged gash.

“Get back,” he ordered, as he pulled a time-delayed capsule out of his belt. “Get back as far as you can!”

“It’s going to blow up?”

“It’s going to stink...”

It had landed at the foot of a mass of rocks, 400 yards above the tree line. The slope was steep, strewn with precariously perched rocks that peaked through the snow like islands in the ocean. Higher up, the twin peaks stood hidden behind clouds.

The two men had located the cocoon an hour after dawn. With infrared binoculars you could detect them in a few minutes. Just the time it took for contact with the snow to dissipate the heat generated by the friction of the air. After that, you had to rely on satellite tracking, the marks left by the impact, luck and, above all, the skill of the trackers. The cocoons landed in the same areas, year after year.

“I’ve set the detonator for three minutes. Let’s get out of here!”

One thing you could say about Lutz, he didn’t waste time talking. His high-altitude guide badge may have been new, but he’d already mastered the basic skills of a good tracker. Including silence.

The two men took shelter in a high-altitude observation point, beyond the range of any rocky debris that might be thrown towards them. They hardly noticed the explosion. The eviscerated envelope stopped burning within a few seconds.

“Let’s go.” (Wander took the lead.) “Now we climb!”

Time was the crucial factor.

The cocoons had started raining down last evening, two days ahead of the usual seven-day schedule. All of the helicopters available took flight. As usual, there weren’t enough. Wander suspected that some of the teams settled for making scientific observations, avoiding their full duty. In this region, an abnormally large number of cocoons birthed. It should not be possible, even

if most of the landing sites could not be reached by air.

The cocoons had reminded humans just how many hard-to-reach spots there were on Earth. The brownish cylinders avoided the oceans but landed absolutely everywhere else. Ice fields, jungles, deserts, mountains... Since the rains had started, five years ago, the swarms had slowly changed their strategy.

Only those cylinders that had landed in the most outlying regions had survived. Was it by choice, or just the simple result of the elimination of the unlucky? People like Wander might be helping the cocoons grow more intelligent. And that was an idea that was hard to swallow. Wander preferred to say that the drops were organized along the lines of an invasion. Some units were sacrificed; some troops infiltrated behind the lines. Deep down, he knew that was wrong, but it made his work easier.

The trouble started with the third cocoon.

The cylinder lay half buried in an opening in the rocky wall, about 20 yards or so above the base. Blackish shale zig-zagged up towards the peak.

From where he stood, Wander could make out the cloak of rock that tumbled down into invisible valleys below, the intact fields of snow, the fog. The air was cold and dry. Clouds frayed lazily as they brushed against the peaks.

It was a perfect day for mountain climbing.

They hammered in their pitons and climbed leisurely. There was no place to stand near the cocoon. Wander climbed around it and down to the end that hung over the rock. Rappelling, he placed a half-dozen charges along the edge of the brown heat-cracked mass. He slashed the rounded end with his machete, driving the blade as deeply as he could into the mass of greenish entrails. It was a pointless gesture. The ability of the extraterrestrial organisms to regenerate was truly terrifying. But it felt strangely soothing all the same.

The simultaneous explosion of the charges freed the cocoon, which fell to the foot of the rock wall, in a deluge of rock. Wander finished it off with napalm, holding a damp handkerchief over his mouth and nose to ward off the fumes. Lutz, his back to the cocoon, was building a pyramid with the debris.

The sleeves of his anorak were studded with shining badges. A golden chain with a baby locket dangled at his wrist. Despite his weather-beaten face, he looked younger than his 25 years, and a lot more vulnerable.

The cocoon stopped burning, with a puff of greenish flames. Looking up, Wander noticed a thin wisp of steam rising out of a lip-shaped ledge near the peak. Even with his binoculars, he was unable to make anything out at all. The overhang blocked his view. But the steam was a sign.

A cylinder had landed there. *The leader of the pack.* Feverishly, he got out the map he used to track the drop sites, year after year. He had the hunch that he had just discovered a new landing site.

"We have to climb up there," he murmured, looking up. "What have you got left by way of explosives?"

Lutz turned around, a shard of shale in his hand and looked up with Wander. He grimaced.

"The overhang?"

"I saw smoke. Do we try for it right away or set up camp?" Lutz sniffed. The stench of the carbonized entrails was gradually dissipating, swept away by the wind. He balanced the stone on the top of his incomplete pyramid and kicked it over.

"I have two charges left," he said, checking his backpack. "We've got five hours of daylight left. It's do-able."

He pulled out a handful of granola bars, offered half to Wander, and started to chew absently. Wander thanked him with a nod. He'd used up almost all of the napalm.

"You want to tell me about it?" Lutz said, between mouthfuls.

"Tell you about what?"

"Why you hate these things. I like to know who I'm climbing with."

Wander gave him a joyless smile. "Wait until we get up there."

The question ran round and round his mind as he climbed up the long wall.

Heavily, at the slow pace of the men, one step after another. Automatic movements – looking for a foothold, shifting the weight of your body upwards – none of it was enough to relieve the tension. That first year, Wander had felt that destroying a certain number of cocoons would erase the memories that tore him apart. He had trusted the power of numbers. He had used his machete to notch the stick of his suffering. But certain things have no measurable end. He had never forgotten.

The sky was filled with falling cocoons. Slowly, with the elegance of falling leaves. They spun as they dropped, caressed by the night winds, and crashed into gardens with the rustle of crushed flowers.

The noise had wakened Marina. She went out onto the terrace, an immense nightgown floating around her thin, five-year-old body. Rubbing her eyes, she leaned against Wander's thigh.

"What are they doing, Daddy?"

"They're falling."

Wander didn't know what else to say. She nodded, gravely, as if that were enough. He caressed her warm, unbelievably soft, cheek.

"You're sleeping kitten. It's just a dream. Let's go to bed."

Wander carried into the coolness of her room and waited until she fell back to sleep.

One of them fell on the terrace and Marina was the first

to find it...

It took them two hours to reach the underside of the stone lip. Wander set the pace. Lutz relayed him. Pitons clicked as they were driven into the cracks in the shale. Steel shackles prevented them from flying down. To keep from falling, Wander refused to look down, and climbed the road to heaven, like a baby. He knew almost all the answers. It was just that he had no interest in the questions.

Lutz was faster than he was – and much more supple. He climbed upward, eyes on the overhang, a smile on his lips. *I like to know who I'm climbing with...* "With nobody", Wander wanted to say. But that was a lie.

To climb up over the lip, they doubled the number of anchors and wove a safety cradle. They divided the explosives equally among themselves, but Lutz carried almost all the napalm cylinders. Wander let Lutz go first, relieved to be resting at the end of his rope like a spider. Fatigue twisted his muscles, making him keenly aware of his fragility. That was one of the reasons he had liked mountain climbing so much, before. The cocoons had changed that too.

The valley below was littered with traces of humankind: toy houses, roads drawn as if with chalk. A few yards above them, a cocoon had come to take all this away from them. It was as simple as that. "No," Wander corrected himself, "it would be as simple as that if I could only believe it."

Maybe then he wouldn't need to climb any more.

"I see the cocoon," said Lutz, raising his voice. "It's a large one. It takes up almost the entire ledge."

"Can you stand?"

"Alone, yes. Do you want to trade places?" Wander hesitated. Lutz was fully capable of destroying the cylinder without him. They never defended themselves. All you had to do was put the charges in the right place, and balance a cylinder of napalm on the cocoon until the explosion turned it over.

"Go ahead," he decided. "Set the charges for three hours. In case you set off an avalanche, I want to make sure it doesn't come tumbling down on me. And..."

"Yeah?"

Wander shook his head, eyes riveted on the scenery below his feet. It would have taken too long to explain. "Be careful, that's all."

Grunting, Lutz hauled himself up onto the overhang.

As the seconds sped by, Wander realized that something abnormal was going on. He felt an infrasonic rumble through the rock, growing in intensity.

He recognized it immediately. He had heard that sound before, at the oasis. Yet again, he wasn't where he ought to have been.

"Get the hell out of there," he screamed. "The cocoon's about to hatch! Get down here!"

"What? Oh, shit..."

Powerless, Wander hung below the stone lip. A sombre mass spun two yards away from him before slipping down. Lutz's bag, with what remained of the napalm.

Too late!

Frantic, Wander tore at the fine, metallic, opaque cover he carried in his breast pocket.

"Cover your eyes! *Don't look at it...*"

He slipped the cover over his head. His sudden movements caused him to swing from right to left, and he struck the wall. By reflex, he clung to it, his mouth bruised by a fragment of shale.

On top of the ledge, the cocoon tore open with a disgusting noise. Lutz cried out, almost sobbing, in ecstasy. Wander covered his ears. Eyelids closed so tightly they hurt, he buried his face against the icy rock, separated from the Revelation by the pathetic thickness of the survival blanket.

Lutz's voice continued to ring out, long after the flight.

The emergency crew arrived the next day, three hours after dawn. Wander's flexible GSM antenna dangled over the edge like a cut wire. An anonymous voice at the other end had noted their position. Leaning against the wall, Lutz stared stubbornly up. His chest moved intermittently and the tip of his index finger twitched, but he showed no other sign of life. When the two rescuers stepped onto the ledge, he didn't notice them.

"You can leave him here," said Wander, "his voice breaking. "Or take him anywhere you want. He's done for."

"He has a wife in the valley," said the older rescuer, as he gently placed a harness around Lutz's waist. "She'll take care of him."

The gutted shell of the cocoon crumbled. Wander kicked at it mechanically, sweeping it over the edge. He watched it fall. Down.

"Up here, he'll be dead in three days. Add another two days if you give him oxygen, maybe two more on top of that if you put him on a respirator. You can speak to him, beg him, even hit him, if you want. It won't do any good!"

Wander shivered and shook his head. "He'll stay quiet up to the end, unless you prevent him from seeing the sky."

"What do you know about it?"

"I just know, that's all."

The second rescuer looked him up and down. He was young, broad-shouldered, and his large calloused hands wrapped Lutz up roughly. "Did you have to climb all the way up here?" he grumbled.

Wander shrugged. An enormous sense of weariness came over him. There would be a new "X" on the landing map and he'd lost Lutz.

"Forget about it," the first rescuer said, as he tied up the harness. "It was an accident."

He glanced at Wander, a question in his eyes, but Wander was thankful for his silence.

"These things have never attacked anyone," the other insisted, looking away from Wander. "They come and they go. What's the point of tracking them like this? You get your fun playing with bombs. That's it, isn't it?"

"I have a government permit..."

The words sounded stupid the minute he uttered them. The first rescuer finished putting the harness on Lutz. He spun him around, tying up the clasps at the back. Lutz suddenly screamed, a heart-shattering cry wrenched from

deep within. Yet, he made no effort to fight. Gently, Wander turned him back towards the sky.

"It will be all right," he said, caressing Lutz's face as if he were a child. "It will come back for you."

"Let him be!" (The harness rattled.) "We'll take him down to the helicopter and then we'll take care of you. Stay out of our way."

"Make sure he can see the sky at all times if you don't want to make him suffer needlessly."

The second rescuer shouldered him aside, pushing him perilously close to the edge.

"Enough of that, Mr Government Man. We'll do your dirty work, but we don't need your advice!"

"Lutz doesn't care about any of this. That's the last thing on his mind." (Wander took a large breath.) "You're being unnecessarily cruel, but I understand. I should have pushed him over the edge before you got here. I just couldn't do it. He would have stared up the entire time he fell and I couldn't find the courage to look back into his eyes."

"He'll be fine," said the rescuer.

"What, are you expecting, a miracle?" Wander was enraged, angered beyond all reason, fury beating under his ribs like a hammer. "Something happens when the cocoon hatches," he said in a heavy voice. "There's a vibration, some sort of sound radiation. I don't know what all. Nothing can be seen on the films that have been made, the light is too bright, and the recordings don't catch all of the frequencies. Those who witness it experience some sort of ecstasy, when all of the roads to heaven open at a single time, and all they have to do is decide how far to go. Beyond your wildest dreams, beyond mine, to where the cocoons come from."

"Lutz shared that. He couldn't help himself. He was too close. And then the Other took off without him."

"You killed him!"

"No." (Wander's eyes filled with tears.) "It's their dreams, the dreams those things have, that killed him."

Lutz, hanging from his rope like a dead weight, spun slowly as he was carried down. Whenever the wall hid the sky from him, he screamed with a desperate violence. His cries reverberated down around the valley, echoing over and over.

"Don't ever come back here," said the colossus who controlled the rope, refusing to look Wander in the eye.

"I'll be back next year," he replied. "And again, the year after that. Until either the cocoons disappear or I do."

"You'll climb alone."

Wander shrugged, "Did Lutz have family in the valley? People who love him?" (The rescuer nodded, grudgingly.) "Then I won't have any problem finding volunteers to climb with me."

Translated from the French by Sheryl Curtis

Jean-Claude Dunyach won the 1998 Prix Rosny aîné (France's annual sf award) for his story "Unravelling the Thread" – translated in *Interzone* 133. Since then we have published another story by him, "Footprints in the Snow" (issue 150). He lives in Blagnac, France.

John Wyndham's new apotheosis in Penguin Classics reminded me of an unlikely title that arrived in e-mail... "The Finnegan Wakes: The disturbing, incest-haunted, cyclical dream of a huge drunken sea-monster is related, using a variety of multi-lingual puns."

ELEPHANT WITH WOODEN LEG

Brian Aldiss was honoured as the latest SFWA Grand Master.

Neil Gaiman was irritated by *Mirror and Mail* newspaper stories claiming he'd accused J. K. Rowling of stealing Harry Potter from his 1990-91 comic series *The Books of Magic* (featuring a bespectacled young wizard). As he told the *Scotsman* journalist who hoped for a shock horror plagiarism exposé, "I doubted she'd read it and it wouldn't matter if she had: I wasn't the first writer to create a young magician with potential, nor was Rowling the first to send one to school. It's not the ideas, it's what you do with them that matters." This being insufficiently newsworthy, the story was improved for publication.

Richard Matheson is this year's International Horror Guild Living Legend Award winner – roughly equivalent to SFWA Grand Master.

Philip Pullman found that Amazon.com's page for his upcoming fantasy included a message supposedly from himself: "Truly my best piece of work. / Good day to all my readers, I never new I had so many who admired my novels so dearly. I am so sorry to all my readers who are waiting for *Amber Spyglass* to come out..." Pullman: "Close textual analysis seemed to cast a doubt over the authorship of this."

J. K. Rowling caused an exciting breakthrough in virtual publishing: "Stocks of the fourth [Harry Potter] novel which Rowling has yet to finish writing have already sold out on the website of internet bookseller Amazon." (Manchester *Metro News*, March)

John Sladek (1937-2000), one of sf's cleverest and funniest writers, died from progressive lung disease on 10 March; he was only 62. From his hilarious 1968 debut novel *The Reproductive System* (US *Mechasm*) to the much darker comedy of *Bugs* in 1989, he exploited sf themes of robots and consciousness to mirror human folly with devastating wit. "Literary" influences like William Gaddis and Joseph Heller were absorbed into the Sladekian narrative madness, replete with wordplay, anagrams, palindromes, ciphers, obsessive narrative patterns and mathematical games. He skewered irrational beliefs and pseudoscience in his nonfictional *The New Apocrypha*, parodied fellow sf authors in squibs collected in *The Steam-Driven Boy*, and lovingly recreated the locked-room

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

puzzles of "golden age" detection with novels like *Black Aura*. In person he was splendidly entertaining company, and will be much missed.

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Adelaide Festivalballs. Our Aussie correspondent enjoyed one 2000 Festival fantasy reading, thus: *Elizabeth Knox* reads from *The Vintner's Luck*, frequently mentioning the angel Xas. *James Griffin*, her introducer: "I'm sure that many of us reading *The Vintner's Luck* would like to know: how do you pronounce the name spelt X-A-S?" *Elizabeth Knox* (exactly as before): "Xas."

James Tiptree Award. This went to Suzy McKee Charnas for her novel *The Conqueror's Child*.

Thog's Genetics Masterclass. Conversation between astronauts: "The difference between human and ape DNA is less than three percent!" Yes, but that's the difference between us – and Einstein! 'Or... *Jack the Ripper*.' (*Mission to Mars* movie, 2000)

R.I.P. *Mary Brown* (1929-1999), UK author whose fantasy debut was *The Unlikely Ones* (1986), died on 20 December; she was 70. *John Colicos*, Shakespearean and movie actor unfortunately best known for playing the villain in *Battlestar Galactica* (1978-79), died in Toronto on 6 March. He was 71. *Alex Comfort* (1920-2000) died on 26 March at age 80; most famous for *The Joy of Sex*, he also wrote satirical sf, such as *Come Out To Play* (1961). *David Duncan* (1913-99), US sf author and screenwriter best remembered for *Occam's Razor* (1957), died on 27 December aged 86. *Gerald A. Facey* (1919-1999), British artist, died last Spring. Steve Holland notes the sf connection: "Facey provided those atrocious covers to the early Spencer magazines (*Futuristic Science Stories*, *Wonders of the Spaceways*, etc)

as well as covers for the boys' magazine/comic *Tarzan Adventures*."

Charles Gray, British actor known for Hammer movies, *Rocky Horror Picture Show* narration and playing Blofeld in *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), died in London on 7 March; he was 71. **Roger Erskine Longrigg** (1929-2000), multi-pseudonymed UK author who wrote some supernatural horror as Domini Taylor, died 26 February aged 70. **Sture Lönneström** (1919-99), the first modern Swedish sf author and the father of Swedish fandom, died on 30 September 1999 aged 80.

Another Secret Identity. Winchell Dredge, author of sensitive character descriptions for *Wild Rampage Wrestling* ("And then, as though to show his true nature, his eyes turn up to show just white, and a demonic tongue snakes out of his mouth") was outed in the *Washington Post* as a pseudonym of sf author David Bischoff. Many *Rampage* contributors are apparently "moonlighting horror and sci-fi scribes"; the magazine's then editor was Scott Edelman of the late *SF Age*.

Small Press. *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature* ed. Andrew M. Butler, Edward James & Farah Mendlesohn is another SF Foundation benefit volume, collecting new critical essays about Mr Discworld. £10 from the SFF c/o 22 Addington Rd, Reading, RG1 5PT. Meanwhile *TWK: The Terry Pratchett Magazine* folded and, coincidentally, the 2000 Discworld convention was cancelled.

Thog's Masterclass. "His wasn't actually a handsome face: without animation, the harsh planes looked uncompromising, the nose prominent, jutting out from a wide and high brow." (Anne McCaffrey, *The Rowan*, 1990) *Dept of Visual Acuity*: "He saw the bullets coming from the other man's gun." (Petru Popescu, *Almost Adam*, 1996) *Dept of Psychic Entendre*. Psychic detective Elaine goes into trance state when helping the police: "You were describing the two in bed," he said. 'Please continue.' / Elaine looked at him a moment, as if deciding whether she wanted to or not. 'It's hard going in and out like this,' she said." (Robert K. Wilcox, *Fatal Glimpse*, 1981) *Dept of Relativity*: "She ducked at the thunder like some stone-age primitive, counting off the seconds until lightning flared as she tried to work out how far away the storm was." (Jon Courtenay Grimwood, *reMix*, 1999) *Dept of Alternate Mathematics*: "...if the entire world were to become a police state obsessed with recovering old secrets, then vast resources might be thrown at the problem of factoring large prime numbers." (Neal Stephenson, *Cryptonomicon*, 1999)

The Cage of CHROME

Christopher Priest

When morning came at last, as the temperature cooled and the cerise shadows of dawn were lengthening across the windswept dunes, I left the motel room where I had endured the long hot night and went in search again of Caterina Bellavista. This doyenne of the great opera houses was preparing for her triumphal first performance, after the years in obscurity in which she had worked to restore her famous voice.

All night I had heard her practising with her Toshiba/Corel Karaoke equipment, rehearsing her performances with the irreplaceable tapes from when her career was at its peak: Puccini's *Quale occhio al mondo puo star di paro* or Verdi's *Gualtier Maldè... Caro nome*. The crystal brilliance of her recordings wove in evanescent descant with her gradually recovering voice, the notes drifting like silver mist around the frozen sonic statues by the beach. As *Tosca*'s high C reverberated through the pre-dawn glow, I stirred myself from my desk where I laboured to complete my recollections of what was to come, and returned to the time-locked beaches surrounding the Cape Canaveral landing sites.

Here, among the thousands of abandoned automobiles, each slowly acquiring a brilliant sheen of reglossed paint and chromium plating as the rust evaporated from them, I searched once more for Caterina's daytime lair. In one of these ancient Chryslers, Hondas and Winnebagos, drawn up on the sands in a vast circle ten miles across, where the original owners had parked them to observe the return to Earth of the Mars craft *Giorgio de Chirico*, Caterina Bellavista had made her home. It seemed to me that it was only a matter of days before her vehicle would be restored to a condition in which her faithful driver and amanuensis, the sinister Sebastian Vint, in his jet-black

Gucci suit and Calvin Klein semi-mirrored shades, would sweep her triumphantly to the great opera houses of the north.

Already, some of the cars on the outer fringes were drivable. Our interminable cold days were often disturbed by the sound of engines, as the former astronauts who lived in Cocoa Beach wandered out to the Cape to drag-race some of the cars along the icy surface of the ancient tarmac highway. These feckless teenagers from space, with their toned bodies and rows of even white teeth, were a daily reminder of the rejuvenation coming to us all.

As time itself wound down from the apex of man's achievement – the ending of history, the solving of all mysteries, the final countdown to omniscience – mankind was on a reverse path to predestined youth and beauty.

I craved entropy instead, sensing that only in death would Caterina be consigned to me forever.

I dreamed of the final burst of frozen sunlight at the end of the day, alone on the beach with her as the shadows shortened, hearing her voice die away, feeling the incandescent heat of the great long night consume us. Around us, the silent abandoned cars would reflect our terminal passion.

Christopher Priest (born 1943) is one of Britain's most highly-praised imaginative writers, but has appeared only once before in *Interzone* with a piece of fiction – "In a Flash" (issue 99), which was actually a pre-publication extract from his prize-winning novel *The Prestige* (1995). He lives in Hastings with his wife, the writer Leigh Kennedy, and their two children.



INT. DAY. MISSION CONTROL.
STORY CONFERENCE IN PROGRESS.

"What we want, see, is a shot-by-shot remake of *2001* that's more like *Armageddon*." "And *Close Encounters*." "So it'll be more of a popcorn kind of movie, but at the same time more of a moving spiritual journey with a message of uplift for all humanity." "And *Apollo 13*." "For an instance, we've ditched Strauss for Van Halen, and Morricone replaces Ligeti; and we want to make the monolith a bit friendlier, like maybe put a happy face on it. You seen these Agency shots of the Smiley on Mars? Well, obviously we had to enhance the image a bit, but you've got to understand this stuff could be dynamite..." "And *Contact*." "We're thinking of calling it *2001 2000*. What do you think? Kubrick has promised to sign us the remake rights just as soon as he's wrapped on *Big Mouth Open* or what it's called." "And every big-dumb-object plot since time began." "So we - hnh, is that a fly on the wall? Eavesdrop on this, motherf—"

<TRANSMISSION ENDS>

MUTANT POPCORN

Nick Lowe

13 MONTHS LATER.

Mission to Mars is finally a reality, a touching final tribute to the master's masterpiece, in which Mars does double duty for the moon (nowadays alien-free, boringly monochrome, passé) and Jupiter (too far, too big, no usable locations), but in other respects the classic prototype achieves the bliss of supreme oneness with every space movie and first-contact narrative since. And what a movie for the millennium it is. In place of the leisurely, low-g pace of the original, we have an impatient plot that jumps straight past all the non-interesting set pieces like departure, journey, and Mars landing (twice), so it can focus instead on the moments that matter: the discovery of a giant Cydonian honker that

snooshes inquisitive areonauts into gory little pieces; the obligatory middle act of tiresome in-flight suspense situations (highlight: spacewalk suits with wrist-mounted custom plot displays that flash POINT OF NO RETURN); the by-numbers final act that walks us patiently through the first-contact movie checklist. This last is crucial, since as a pro-space, pro-sf, pro-NASA text, *Mission to Mars* is committed to the fast-track approach to alien contact, according to which (i) there are philanthropic aliens hiding under every unturned rock in the solar system; (ii) they all have free interstellar travel and will slingshot us straight through to galactic transcendence central if we just smile nicely and punch our tickets at the turnstile.

For that's what the space programme is all about: "to stand on a new world," Gary Sinise tells us, "and look beyond it to the next one." No room here for the possibility that other worlds might be quite boring, lifeless lumps of rock with no payoff beyond some like really interesting data on how the solar system formed – if a Mars programme can't deliver on alien life, it's not worth supporting, right? The by now complete fusion of NASA's mission with the master narratives of science fiction is laid clearly out in the big opening cast party where everyone speaks in exposition. Sample cocktail chat: "This should have been your mission, yours and Maggie's. If Maggie hadn't gotten sick, if you hadn't pulled yourself out of rotation to take care of her..." "Naw, putting the first footprints on Mars, that's for guys who" (pokes cast member A) "wrote their PhDs on how to colonize the place, and guys" (turns to cast member B) "who read too much science fiction as a kid and still wear those Flash Gordon rocketships around their neck." But you see, it's that very fan pendant that turns out to be our hero's token of passage from bereavement to Bowmanization, his final ascent to the stars in a beam of heavenly light.

A vote for space funding is a vote for all the sf clichés to come true, which is why it's such a vital part of the brief that *Mission to Mars* should include not one single solitary original idea: that it should stand as a kind of digitally-projected museum of space-movie plotting, quoting freely from everything you've ever loved and much that you've sat through ho-humming, with Syd Mead designs, ILM FX, and Brian De Palma on his best nick-everything-in-sight form. Whatever's out there, you can bet it'll be just like the movies.

Stanley himself, of course, had a little more foresight, to the point of thoughtfully leaving us islanders a little something in his will – even if we now know that Kubrick buried his time capsule not out of pique at the reviewers, but because the St Albans constabulary pointed out that his Chilwickbury estate was itself an ideal excursion opportunity within easy reach of London for fanboy nad-sats out for a nochy's smeks. Nevertheless, for the lost generation who weren't of an age in 1971-3 and for nigh thirty years have had to make do with the book, what my local digiplex truncated to a *A Clockwork Orange* is a remarkable experience: clearly once a great film, now a fascinating curiosity that's passed its show-by in all manner of interesting ways that lesser works of its time can't match.

The first surprise is how slavishly it follows the plot and even the dialogue of the novel, aside from the famous lost ending deleted from the US edition. But everything is filtered through Kubrick's uncannily prophetic sense of exactly what elements of the world of 1970 would be cheesiest 30 years down the line. Though he scores rather well on landscape, with brilliant use of the old Docklands and the new Thamesmead, the production design is something else – a world entirely without taste, as though the '60s ran through the buffers and just kept on going – and the supporting performances something else entirely. The dawn of the '70s in British film was not a golden time of comedy character acting, and much of what was clearly meant to seem cartoonish at the time now looks merely freakish. What Patrick Magee thought he was doing is a secret he's sadly taken to his grave, and in general Kubrick's idea of broad comedy is a very strange place you wouldn't want to revisit.

Most seriously, if you come to it from the book and from any time post-rather than pre-punk, its sense of youth is dispiritingly middle-aged. Even at his peak in *If*, and with all the suspension of disbelief anyone could willingly muster, Malcolm MacDowell couldn't actually pass for 15 (Alex's age in the book); and the supremely nasty episode in the book where Alex rapes a pair of ten-year-old girls becomes a harmless period romp with properly nubile and consenting dollybirds – which does now manage to be perfectly distasteful in its own right, but not in the way either book or film intended. All in all, it's a bizarre gem, but probably stopped being a film you could take seriously round about 1982. (The book has actually held up rather better, notwithstanding its author's lifelong attempts to demote it in the canon.) It might have been a more durable, though perhaps not a better, film for having been made three or

four years later, when the '60s had worn off and it was possible to think about male violence and women's bodies with slightly clearer heads – when, like Alex in the lost final chapter, psychedelic cinema simply grew up and got a life.

Back here in the real future, real youngsters know that a movie that's only a movie is a rather half-hearted way to take your parents' money – which is why the virulent fun-form known as *Pokémon* is such a fascinating new phase in the evolution of entertainment. Its purely technical achievement is the symbiosis of differing gaming media (primarily, but not exclusively, console and trading-card games) in a single mythos, which in turn has made for a generalizable model of collectable duelling merchandise whose value is massively added. But of course its triumph as a global phenomenon is down to the way it's so brilliantly optimized for playground culture: competitive yet cooperative, requiring one-to-one interaction with peers in a neverending round of trade negotiations and formal ritual combats, and dependent on a continuing input of both pocket-money and playtime to train your investment up to ultimately-unattainable levels.

The anthropological fascination of all this is that, while its gaming concepts are piratically western, the actual *Pokémon* iconology and myth are completely batty and Japanese in a way that no previous cultural fad has been. As is well known, the comparatively late arrival of the *Pocket Monsters* in the west was the result of Nintendo's, and their prospective licensees', anxiety that the whole franchise was just too weird to succeed outside the home market. The design, nomenclature, and powers of the 151-and-counting *Pokémon* species, and the cartoon narratives out of which they were originally hatched, are quintessential Far-East bonkers. This is doubtless one reason why the original narrative corpus of Japanese TV cartoons that sustains the mythology is probably the least travelled element of the franchise; and why the subsequent movie series, now in its third instalment back home, has taken so long to launch in the west, and in a heavily re-edited form.

It has to be said that, considered simply on its merits as a piece of juvenile anime, *Pokémon: The First Movie* is pretty routine, and hardly the title one would pick to represent its rich, often magnificent, genre to a western multiplex audience. Its interest lies principally in the imperfect attempts of the westernized version to edit around some of the weirder flights of plotting, and in the exten-



sion of the game-based narrative skeleton to accommodate genre *anime* themes: the monster-on-monster face-offs; the psychotic superpowered mutant bent on global devastation (here by worldwide typhoon, a nicely Japanese conceit). In some ways more instructive than the *Mewtwo* movie itself is the supporting short *Pikachu's Vacation*, a fairly uncompromising specimen of the undoctored *Pokémon* genre in its native Saturday-cartoon animation style, gibberish dialogue, wonkily non-western humour, and strange, disorienting bursts of narrative static between scenes. Easily the weirdest thing on our screens this season, it's the place to go if you just want that feeling of having fallen asleep in your seat and woken up in a baffling future where even the cartoons have evolved beyond comprehension.

Nevertheless, both films try hard to give the licence a benign ideological spin, with an intriguing attempt to pass off *Pokémon* combat as anti-violence, a kind of ritualized duelling that contains and channels antagonistic energies in harmless, bloodless, ultimately bonding ways. "Pokémon by nature are friendly creatures," explains the *Vacation* v/o, "and prefer cooperation to confrontation" – a message picked up and amplified by the main feature, whose mass-combat climax is bizarrely staged to an uplifting mid-tempo soft-rock song about broth-

erhood, and elicits the comment "Pokémon aren't meant to fight, not like this. They're all living creatures. This proves that fighting is wrong." Whether this samurai symbiosis of master and collectable will wear in the west is one of the many unresolved cultural experiments surrounding the whole phenomenon; but at this stage, I still think the *Pokémon* event is probably more to be welcomed than deprecated. There again, I'm not the parent of a 5-to-12-year old.

If *Pokémon* comes from the future, the marvel that is *Being John Malkovich* seems to have fallen from another dimension. Even its own makers can't give a convincing explanation of how a film so completely lacking in precedent, genre, or obvious point should have come into existence at all ("Michael Stipe was supportive," they mumble), or why such an obviously unworkable idea should have resulted in a film that works on so many levels that nobody can easily say what they are, or how. "Do you see what a metaphysical can of worms this portal is?" says puppeteer Craig of his secret passage into *Malkovich*'s consciousness. "It raises all sorts of philosophical questions!" If I was waldoing the Maxine character at that point, I'd have her say "Oh yeah? Name one" – because, despite what's sometimes claimed, *Malkovich* explores issues of

personal identity and the cult of celebrity only in the very limited, very literal sense that the plot premises suspend reality on both. Rather, what Kaufman and Jonze have come up with is a film that deftly manages to replicate the *Malkovich* condition, a blank surface on to which willing audiences project their own dreams.

Insofar as it's about anything at all, it's about the limits of cinema: the medium's own failure to allow the full immersive experience feebly simulated by its narrative devices, PoV camera, and crudely identificationist cult of the protagonist. Despite the movie's protestations, it used to be easy enough to be someone else for 15, or indeed 110, minutes: you just bought a ticket at your local Gaumont and *believed*. What *Malkovich* confronts is the fact that we've seen too much docusoap, done too much PlayStation, read too many celebrity profiles for the old sorts of belief to work: that film is no longer interactive enough to satisfy; that we can only become the character, and not the celebrity inside; that we can't live inside their eyes, order towels over their telephone, have sex with their organs. It's not just the use of John *Malkovich* that plays with this. If this were an innocent film, Cameron Diaz playing frumpy could be construed as merely casting against type. In *Malkovich*, it's more: it's impossible to look at these professionally beautiful performers dressing down without thinking, well, if she'd just lose the wig she'd look like a screen dream, and actually John Cusack is cuter in a beard and ponytail than you've ever seen him. (Who, given their pick of body from the cast, would choose bald, flabby, forty-something *Malkovich* over either?)

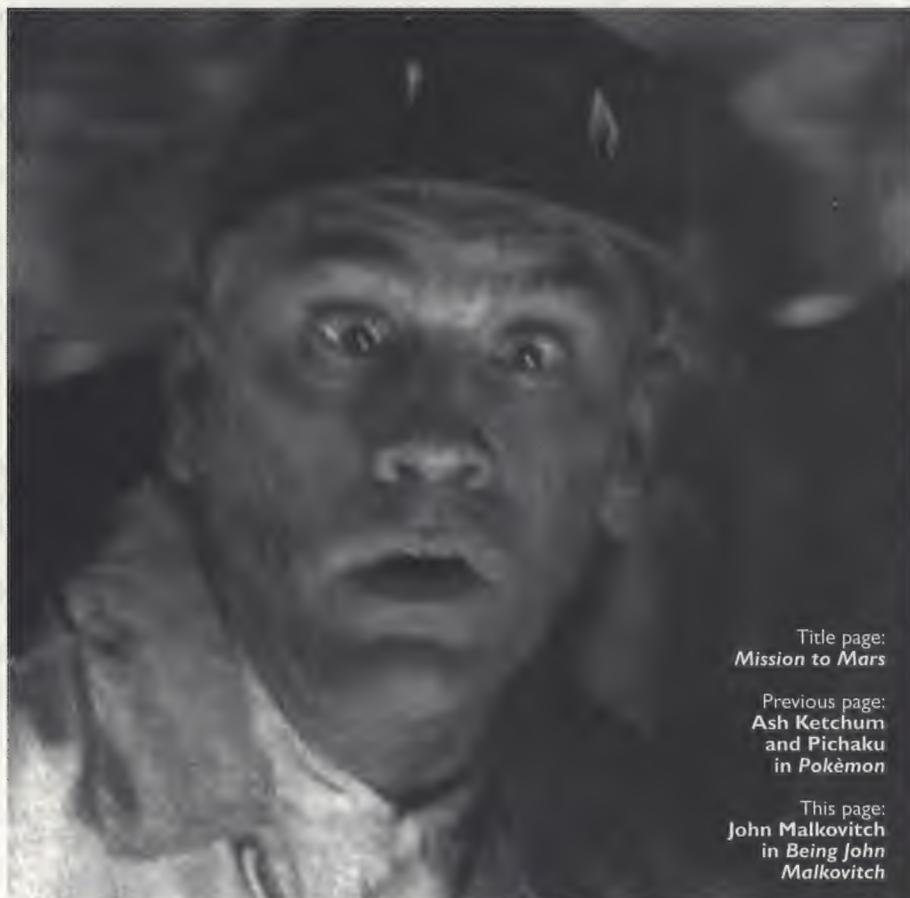
But I'm not sure that any of this has much to do with the movie's appeal, which is largely down to simple craftsmanship. Essentially a Python sketch done in feature-length Hollywood deadpan, with real plotting, real production values, and real actors playing properly-written characters, *Malkovich*'s secret weapon is its conceptual follow-through: the way the plot development delicately layers up the daft premise with artfully-paced twist after twist, and with very upmarket throwaway gags in the spaces between. Even in the giddy finale, as the plot tunnel closes towards its outlet, it's not at all obvious where it's going to spit us out. It's a long time since we've even seen this much money and craft spent on jokes this silly; to cap all this with an ending you can't see coming seems almost a treat too many. Looking forward to the remake.

Nick Lowe

Title page:
Mission to Mars

Previous page:
Ash Ketchum
and *Pichaku*
in *Pokémon*

This page:
John Malkovich
in *Being John*
Malkovich



A Change of Yesterday

Yvonne Navarro

In Year Zero, World War III ends with the covert deployment of Operation Arabian Night by Commander Kamal Asanbayev. The President of the United States, the most powerful nation on Earth, has been cowed beneath the threat of global nuclear war wielded by forces in the Middle East. Congress is in chaos, his armed forces in confusion and nearing defeat. He knows nothing of Asanbayev's carefully constructed plan beyond that it was successful and that he and the rest of the globe are immensely grateful. He is a fool and he wakes on the morning of Day One to find himself under arrest and impeached by his own cabinet on the grounds of cowardice and failure to act.

NATO has disintegrated, its former members appalled and outraged by the millions who have already died, the mini-wars sweeping through their own countries halted at last by Asanbayev's bloody victory.

Nothing remains of Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Middle Eastern countries immediately flanking them but a radiation-soaked wasteland. Millions upon millions more have died, but no one remembers them in the wake of the celebration that follows the end of this devastating war.

"What if we take him out... here?" The first man draws a breath and points to a date on the chart in front of him. His eyes are wide and green and utterly terrified.

On Day Five the President is tried and found guilty by a hastily-convened jury of his peers presided over by Commander Asanbayev. Judgment is swift and merciless, and time is of the essence; on Day Six, the President's execution is shown around the world via the miracle of satellite broadcast.

The second man frowns in concentration, then shakes his head. "No good. At this point in his life, he is already a prodigy in Kazakhstan, a mastermind of merciless military strategy in his country. He is well guarded – access to him will be impossible. Even should we succeed, his administration will make him a teenaged martyr, a sort of fallen god upon which to build an entire regime of terror." He pauses, then reaches for a silk handkerchief and wipes his face with a hand that can't stop shaking; his trembling has nothing to do with age. "They'll display his body in a crystal casket and use it to motivate their countrymen to what they could have been had the boy lived. It must be younger still."

On Day Ten comes the proposal for and ratification of the NewWorld Administration, a coalition of global authority carrying as its membership one representative for each country, be it president, queen, or dictator, regardless of size. Its leader, the ultimate in power and decision-making control, is to be someone chosen by a majority vote of the membership with a term of five years.

There have been so many notes and so much research, meetings that last not for hours but for days on end. Even so, the first man's expression still holds a fraction of useless hope. "You're sure we will have only one chance at this? There might be something else, something we missed..."

In Year One of the NewWorld Administration, newly elected World Monarch Asanbayev passes legislation that demands equality for women in every country. Global economy improves significantly as the workforce swells and productivity increases.

"There isn't," the second man interrupts. His voice is firm but exhausted. "We were able to prove that the test transporter successfully moved its cargo one week into the past, but it destroyed itself in the process. It took me nine years of research and development to construct these two, and now we have only the second machine. There is no more money, anywhere, to construct another, no place to have the parts moulded and the circuit boards manufactured." His face is sunken from worry and fatigue, but his eyes are bright with anxiety as he looks at his companion. "We must make our choice carefully, my friend. We will never get another opportunity."

In Year Two, Monarch Asanbayev imposes a mandatory recall on all privately-owned firearms and decrees that only authorized governmental agencies may carry weapons. Newly developed supercomputer software is used to track down and reclaim weapons from those reluctant to comply, and violators are quietly and severely disciplined. Initial reports indicate no drop in crime, so NewWorld military sweeps are made in small countries and areas where residents, accustomed to keeping weapons as a way of life (legal or otherwise), ignore the recall and the guns are forcibly retrieved.

Hundreds of thousands of resisters die, but people assume that those who refuse to give up their weapons

are dangerous and therefore deserve it.

Within 90 days, private gun ownership drops to less than five percent worldwide.

They bend and again study the history books, so crisp and newly printed. There is much within the pages that is deception, but the dates appear to be correct. Finally, the first man straightens and folds his hands in front of him as if in prayer. His colleague raises his face expectantly and their eyes meet.

In Year Three, Monarch Asanbayev announces that people worldwide would no longer be held financially responsible for those who will not work; following this, he abolishes social assistance and welfare in all forms, dismantling in one sweep all systems of housing aid, food provision and medical assistance.

Without family to care for them, millions die but no one can help.

The second man unlocks the middle drawer of his desk and slides it open, then reverently withdraws a box with a dull chrome finish. He places it on the desk, opens its two clasps, then raises the lid. Both men stare at the weapon inside. "State of the art," the older man rasps. "Royal Government issue." He does not have to add that they would both be executed without a trial if the stolen weapon were discovered in this room; both know this already.

"God help us," the first man whispers. "I will sacrifice myself if I must, but I am not a child murderer."

In Year Four, Monarch Asanbayev declares all government-controlled social security and retirement programmes worldwide are defunct. Payments are halted and the funds rerouted to finance military holdings and salaries that ensure his power base will remain stable.

Despite the efforts of the already poverty-stricken to care for their elderly, millions more die. There are now only three classes: government, military, and the common man. No one among the common man has the strength or resources to fight.

"Then we will do it another way," the second man says with deadly calm. He turns to look at another stack of papers on the desk, these more personal: past records of mother, father and other family members, all obtained at great risk. He gathers them together, then hands them to his compatriot with something like devotion. "We will go back even farther."

By Year Five, Monarch Asanbayev's strategy is complete. He rules with absolute power and no one, no matter how powerful, dares to challenge him. There is and will be no new election and he proclaims himself the designated ruler of the United People of Earth *in perpetuum*.

"And you must see to it that he is never born."

Then the horror truly begins.

"Look how beautiful the park is this morning," the stranger standing next to her at the railing said. "The rhododendrons in particular."

Helen turned her head toward the voice automatically, meeting the speaker's gaze without meaning to. His eyes were a peculiar shade of green – light and sparkling in the sun – that reminded her of a shallow seashore at

high noon. She meant only to nod and smile politely, but the gentleman's next words compelled a response despite herself.

"That bush," he said, "the one at the end with the white flowers and purple centres – the lovely purple matches your suit."

"Thank you," Helen said, feeling herself blush. She started to turn away, then realized he had said something more. "Pardon me?"

"This is the first time I've visited Eugene," he repeated. He hesitated for a moment, then continued. "I wonder if you might recommend somewhere for lunch."

Helen studied him, noting the fine grey suit and conservative tie. "Are you here on business?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact. I'm looking into buying a site for a branch of my engineering company out here." He offered his hand. "My name is Nash Chaney."

"Helen Atronna." It was her turn to hesitate, then she let her instincts guide her. After all, public relations was what she did, and she was damned good at it – hadn't it brought her to this monumental turning point in her life? "I work at the Eugene Chamber of Commerce."

Nash's face brightened. "Then perhaps you can refer me to someone who can help me tour the city. I added a few days but didn't have time to plan a sight-seeing itinerary."

Helen smiled. "That's my department, actually. I'm the Director of Tourism." When his return smile was obviously relieved, she realized that he was quite handsome in a down-home American sort of way, with those seafoam green eyes, blonde hair, and the build of a healthy farmboy – quite the opposite of the man who had just last night become her fiancé. Nash looked so vulnerable standing there that she hated to turn him over to one of her staff members, relegate this seemingly naive gentleman to yet another stranger. She looked at her watch just to instill the impression that this was part of her business day, then said, "I haven't had lunch yet myself. Why don't we go together and I can give you a few suggestions on what to see in Eugene?"

The scientist has taken great care to make his notes meticulous, hoping they will still exist if the past, and thus history itself, changes. The time paradox that he struggles to defeat is a perplexing thing, and he will more than likely not be the victor. If the Monarch is never born, he will never write the notes to begin with; but for this to happen, his comrade must be successful in his journey back in time to prevent it. He tries nonetheless, tucking pieces of paper written in his own private code between the pages of the transporter research journals because that project was started long before the Monarch's name became the cause of conversation in every household around the world – with or without him, the transporter's research will still exist.

The romance between her and Sergey Asanbayev had been a strange and whirlwind thing, not the sort of development anyone would have expected. She'd met him at a welcome reception hosted by the Eugene Chamber of Commerce – after all, it wasn't often that this small but

friendly northwestern city had a visitor from a country that had emerged as the most powerful one remaining from the former Soviet Union. Sergey was the son of Kazakhstan's First Deputy Prime Minister; his father's brother had married a Western woman in a ceremony in New York City the previous month, and it was Sergey's duty to present the new in-laws with the first of a shipment of gifts sent by the daughter and her new husband.

Helen's research into Kazakhstani culture had proven invaluable — Kazakhs prided themselves on having exceptional hospitality and Helen was determined that her hometown meet its visitor's high standards. Her presentation had included a selection of superior American food as well as carefully prepared traditional Kazakh dishes — *kazy*, *shuzhuk*, *zhaubuirek*, *beshbarmak* and others, painstakingly arranged on a hand-embroidered *dashtarkhan* in the centre of the reception hall.

Those involved in their secret project are not numerous. It is only himself and another woman now, waiting and hoping, neither caring if they never realize the change of yesterday if only the one they sent back succeeds.

She had expected an older man who would accept the attention graciously but quietly disapprove of American culture, perhaps even find the marriage between his family and the Westerner offensive. Sergey Asanbayev had demolished Helen's preconceptions the moment she had set her gaze upon him: 30 years old and dressed in an impeccably styled Italian suit, his swarthy good looks were only enhanced by the slightly Mongol tilt of eyes that were dark as an oil pit but rimmed with a strange burnished gold, as odd as the girl in that famous *National Geographic* refugee photograph.

His scrutiny had nearly hypnotized her at first but the feeling was apparently mutual. Sergey was a high-powered diplomat but he was also a man; he had been taken not only with the personal attention she had devoted to his welcoming ceremony but with Helen herself. His plans were to be in Eugene for a week, but he had extended his stay for nearly a month, filling her office and home with flowers and gifts, working his way into her heart with his charming smile and absolute devotion. He wined her and dined her and, finally, promised her essentially an entire country if only she would become his wife. They were to be married in a small American ceremony, very private and non-religious, in two weeks.

It was that promise she was endangering tonight by sitting across the table with a stranger named Nash Chaney.

This is harmless, she thought to herself as they waited for the appetizer. I'm in love with Sergey, thank you very much, and I'm only doing my job here. This man will bring a business and jobs here, and be good for Eugene. Nonetheless, she'd dressed with exceptional care and brushed her strawberry blonde hair until it shone.

"It's so beautiful here," Nash said again. "I can't get over all the flowers, all the colour. So lush."

"You're from Illinois, right?" Helen couldn't help her puzzled expression. "It can't be that much different."

Nash shrugged. "The northwestern area of Chicago," he said. "And it can be beautiful, of course. Unfortunately

our warm seasons are quite short. A favourite saying is that we have only winter — nine months of it — and summer. Summers are generally rather uncomfortable because of the high temperatures and extreme humidity. I've read that your northwest coast is temperate year round."

"Yes, it's usually very pleasant." Helen sat back and watched as the waiter placed a shared order of crabcakes in bernaise sauce on the table. "We have a lot of rainfall, of course — this is the rainbelt — but winter temperatures seldom drop below 40. In the summer, 80 degrees is high."

Small talk, nothing more: the climate, the city, the economy; gradually moving into the personal arena of each other's lives, nothing too intrusive. Helen felt at ease with Nash in a way she didn't with Sergey — with her fiancé, she realized with dismay as she laughed with Nash over something the waiter said, everything was based on appearances. In an eye-opening moment Helen saw her life as it would be a year from now: living in a strange country with a harsh climate and an unknown language, the wife of a diplomat and someone considered nearly royalty in the city of Almaty, the exotic meals of mutton and seasoned horse- and goatflesh now everyday fare. In the United States Helen had her career but little else; her family was only her mother and father, who had retired to Florida several years ago and were getting on in years. The U.S. had nothing with which to hold her, and Kazakhstan had Sergey and the pampered life of a high-ranking diplomat's mate...

...and the power that came with that rank and, presumably, someday becoming the mother of his children.

Helen blinked and realized that Nash was saying something, felt her cheeks pinken at her rudeness. "I'm sorry," she said as smoothly as she could. "I was... remembering something that needs dealing with at work. What did you say?"

Nash's gaze was warm and his smile sent a deliciously daring and completely unexpected thrill through her. "If it isn't an imposition, I was wondering if you would let me take you to dinner tonight."

Dinner? She hadn't thought to mention to Nash that she was engaged. She should tell him now, because it would never do for her to let him escort her on what could only be seen as a dinner date—

"I'd like that very much."

The food was good, the wine excellent, the company exquisite, but the excitement Helen felt could not be explained or excused by any of it. She'd chosen Mazzy's on Amazon Drive, an intimate Italian restaurant removed from Eugene's small downtown area and in which they were extremely unlikely to run across anyone who knew her or Sergey. Now, sitting across the table from Nash and watching the candlelight play across his handsome features, she thought she could stay here forever, look at him, listen to him, bask in his presence. Dear God, where had this man been last year, or last month, or even last week? She wouldn't admit it to anyone but her parents, but in her younger days she'd lis-

tended to country music; now a line from a Reba McIntyre song floated momentarily through her head, probably the same sentence said a thousand times a day around the world: *"Where were you when I could have loved you?"*

"I feel as though I've known you for years," Nash said. "Do you realize that we've been here for over three hours?" He smiled. "It seems like only a few minutes."

With a shock, Helen saw his hand reach for hers and knew she should pull away before they touched. But she didn't, she couldn't, she didn't *want* to, and the jolt of attraction that razored through her nearly made her gasp aloud. For heaven's sake, this man was practically a stranger... but why did every fibre of herself scream that she should be with him? Before she could say anything, the waiter arrived with a dessert tray, tempting them both with an array of cakes and chocolates in ridiculous and irresistible shapes. Giddy from the wine, they chose the same thing – a funny little dog – then dissolved in laughter, ultimately waiting for the final course of the meal without needing to speak. Helen let the star-filled night, the sweet dark chocolate, more of the smooth white wine and, most of all, the warmth of Nash's hand over hers sweep Sergey from her mind for a few precious hours.

She woke lying next to Nash in the morning with the taste of wine and love in her mouth, and the prospect of disaster in her heart.

Turning her head carefully, already feeling an alcohol headache that would probably plague her for the next two days, Helen studied Nash's sleeping profile and waited for her pulse to calm. She had not planned to meet Sergey Asanbayev, nor to become engaged to him as he enticed her with aristocratic ways, visions of power and a life the likes of which she would never, *ever*, have in the United States. Fate, however, had made her encounter the man who now slept so peacefully next to her, this Illinois businessman named Nash Chaney who had in the course of a single evening stolen her heart from a foreigner she'd believed had a lock on it. Beneath the crumpled covers on the bed – his hotel room – his hand rested on her thigh, his touch even in sleep sending a course of electricity along the surface of her skin, making her long to wake him up and love him all over again. She didn't dare; last night's lovemaking – and she remembered every detail – had been so uncharacteristic of her and also a terrible risk. So many horror stories from friends about AIDS or herpes or unwanted pregnancy, and there the two of them had been, without even the simplest of protection.

Assuming all was well, just her presence here could destroy her future, make Sergey's offer disintegrate like the ashes of a dead fire blown away by the wind; on the other hand, it could offer her a totally different destiny, a gentler one where she needn't leave her homeland and her family and within which she could remain comfortably familiar with the language and the customs of the people surrounding her. On the face of it, it seemed she could even stay in Eugene, a place she'd never truly wanted to leave to begin with.

How to choose?

Reluctantly Helen eased her leg out from under Nash's fingers and sat up on the side of the king-sized bed. Her clothes were strewn about the floor, the black dress – and hadn't she chosen it for the way it flattered her figure? – on one side, lacy undergarments and silky black hosiery on the other. No doubt she'd find her shoes in the front hallway, and how on earth was she going to get out of this hotel room and back to her apartment without someone in her building noticing that she was dressed for an evening out? The thought put a scowl on Helen's face and momentarily thickened the throbbing in her head, but there was nothing to do but deal with it and hope for the best.

Taking care not to wake Nash, she stood and scurried to the bathroom. The hotel room wasn't large, not at all the sort of luxury appointments that Sergey – with whom she had yet to share a bed – had commanded during his month-plus stay in Eugene. She was inside the small bathroom in seconds, smothering a girlish giggle and peeking back through the doorway at Nash's sleeping form like a teenaged girl flirting with a boy at school. The thought brought a sort of confusing, guilty delirium – did she really want to give up all those things that Sergey could offer her for the soft-spoken man asleep in the other room?

Dear God, the answer was yes.

"Where have you been?" he demands. His voice is harsher than intended, her unexplained three-hour absence during their vigil having made him fear for her safety. They are so close to the Royal Palace in Almaty, and there are so many guards and spies—

"I received a note from a contact in the Palace, a clerical worker in the Office of Corrected Records," she says.

"You must be careful!"

"He is a former history teacher and believes we are recorders with which the Monarch's administration can no longer be bothered," she continues patiently. "He has family in Burundaj, and they are hungry. In return for 3,000 rubles, he offered me this."

She sets an unopened box, just a small thing, on the table.

Sighing, Helen tried to close the door and found it blocked at the base by Nash's suit jacket. She blushed when she recalled how it had ended up there, how she'd nearly yanked it off him within a minute of their arrival. Bending carefully, mindful of the stinging in her head, she hooked a finger under the collar and lifted it, intending to drape it over the hook on the back of the door. Something inside the pocket thumped against the ceramic floor and Helen realized the jacket was unaccountably weighty when it nearly slid off her outstretched finger. A quick grab and she had it, her fingers closing securely around something heavy and unyielding beneath the fabric. Something that felt like...

...a gun.

She stood for a few endless seconds, mind spinning blankly and unable to process the message her now-trembling finger was sending to her brain. What possible use could an engineering executive from a small city in Illi-

nois have for a weapon?

Suddenly the silence in the bedroom became frightening – was she wrong, or hadn't Nash snored lightly while he slept? No such sound broke the stillness now and beneath her bare feet the tiles had begun to feel inexplicably frigid. Abruptly Helen felt as if she was standing not on a normal bathroom floor but on ice; thin and perilous, a fragile frozen sheet that separated her once-bright future from something black and horrible.

Shivering, she eased the bathroom door shut, wincing when the latch caught with a *click*, holding her breath until she was sure Nash was still asleep. Her hand moved quickly and quietly and without hesitation as she slid her fingers into the pocket and pulled out a small chrome-plated pistol. Frowning, Helen turned it over and inspected it. She wasn't familiar with guns but she'd certainly seen enough of them on television, yet this one seemed odd, unlike anything recognizable. Was it actually a gun? It was the correct shape, but the muzzle tapered off and was surrounded by a coil of some sort, like a cartoonish replica of a Martian ray gun; still, it carried far too much weight to be anything pretend.

Helen chewed her lip, then pressed her ear to the door next to the jacket, trying to reassure herself that Nash still slept. Convinced, at least for now, she ran her hand over the suitcoat until it stopped on another bulge – his wallet. Who was Nash Chaney, really? He'd seemed to sincere and personable, knowledgeable about a field with which she was totally unfamiliar. She'd taken him at his word, believed everything he'd said, but now, to find this weapon in the pocket of his suitcoat... Jesus, had she made the biggest mistake of her life last night? And did she dare gamble her entire life without knowing for sure?

It didn't make her happy to do it, but Helen pulled out Nash's billfold anyway.

The box is sealed with yellowed plastic tape and bears a U.S. return address and an old Florida postmark in its upper right corner. It is addressed to the First Lady and they open it carefully, mindful of the aged and yellowed documents – letters – they find inside. The envelopes and pages are trimmed in various floral borders and bear a woman's handwriting. "Where did these come from?" he asks, frowning. "Why didn't we find these before, when we had access to the storage areas at the Palace?"

"My contact told me the box was stored in the First Lady's chambers, in the bottom of an armoire. The armoire was being cleaned out by a servant, and the clothes inside were to be disposed of. He caught her trying to steal it – she thought she could sell whatever was inside as mementoes – and dismissed her. He swears her silence is assured by the threat of execution for theft from the Royal Family."

They place the box between them on the table and begin to read the letters inside.

She was sitting on the chair by the desk and ready when he opened his eyes.

"It's about time you woke up," Helen said. Her voice was calm but there was no disguising the rage she felt; her teeth were grinding together with the effort it was

taking not to start screaming at him.

Still half-asleep, the man in the hotel bed started to smile at her and that made Helen want to go to him and kiss him, and that made her even angrier. How stupid, she thought coldly, could one woman get over a man?

Plenty.

"No, no – don't get up, Mr Hayes," she said rigidly. "Just stay where you are and don't even think about moving."

Her lover from last night – now it seemed such a long time ago – stopped for a moment, then reflexively started to throw off the covers. "I can explain," he said. "If you'll just let me –"

Helen raised her hand and pointed the odd-looking pistol at him. She wasn't sure how to use it, but there was a close enough resemblance between it and a normal gun to make her think things were pretty much the same – you aimed and squeezed the trigger; as far as she could tell, there wasn't anything on it that resembled a safety. Apparently Mr Sloan Hayes thought so too, because when he saw the gleam of chrome in her hand, he froze.

"I don't even know who you are," Helen said almost conversationally. "I met you and spent some time with you, and I guess I fell in love. I even slept with you – I can't believe I did that – and now I find out you're probably nothing but some scummy travelling salesman or something, a guy in town for a week and looking to score for the fun of it."

"You don't really believe that," he said.

She stared at him, hating herself for the tears that were starting to blur her vision, hating herself for the sliver of her heart that wanted desperately to trust him. "What is this thing?" she demanded instead of answering. "What does it do?"

"It's like a gun," he said quietly. "Only more lethal."

Helen stared at him, unable to understand the concept of something worse. "Why?"

"Because there isn't the option of just injuring someone with it," he said. "Only killing them."

There was a flat quality to the answer that made her, at least in this case, believe him. Helen gave a short nod then felt on the desktop with her other hand until she touched his wallet, sliding it over to where she could glance from the identification in it and back to him and still feel safe.

"Sloan Hayes," she read. "This says you're from Canada, not Illinois."

"I'm sorry."

Her stomach twisted and she almost couldn't get her next question to come out. "Why did you lie to me?"

"I had no choice," he said simply. "If I'd told you the truth from the start, you never would have believed me. You probably won't believe me now."

"I don't have any reason to," she said, cutting him off. Her gaze went back to the weapon in her hand and she gave a little wave with it, saw Sloan flinch in response. "Perhaps I should just call the police and let them deal with you, and with this thing."

"I haven't found anything so far," he says. His companion doesn't answer and he glances at her, then feels

dread settle along his spine. She is staring at the letter in her hand, more of that crumbling flower-trimmed stationery, and the expression on her face is one of growing horror. "What is it?" he demands. His fingers reach for the letter. "What have you found?"

She gives it to him without speaking and her hands are shaking so badly that the two pages beat against each other and make a sound like the wings of some dark and vile insect.

"You can't do that," he said.

"Watch me!"

He shook his head. "No, you won't. You have everything to lose, and we both know it. If you'll just let me explain—"

"Don't underestimate me again, Mr Hayes," Helen said. "I may have been a fool for you last night, but I guarantee that's not something that will happen again." She could hear a dangerous edge in her own voice, and his expression made it clear that he'd noticed it too.

"I was sent to stop you from marrying Sergey Asanbayev," he said without her asking.

She stared at him, uncomprehending. "What?"

Sloan leaned forward on the bed, his expression pleading. "You mustn't marry him, Helen. If you do, you and he will have a son, and under Asanbayev's tutelage that boy will, through a series of events too complicated to spell out for you, end up being the first world-wide dictator. He'll rule the world, Helen, *everything*, and God help us all but he won't do it with kindness. There'll be death and bloodshed and torture—"

"Stop it!"

"Forty-three years from now," Sloan said ominously, "World War III will start with an offensive by forces in a Saudi Arabia that you wouldn't recognize now, a country which will gain immense nuclear power from its alliance with three other countries over there. Millions of people will die, and two years later your son will stop it with a secret counter-attack that will kill tens of millions more. This will lead to him eventually being voted into the newly created office of Monarch—"

"You're insane," Helen interrupted. "I refuse to listen to this." The pain in her head had become nearly unbearable, and this stranger's accusations were making her pulse race and only intensifying the agony. She was trembling so badly that it felt as though the room was coming apart around her, the same way her life seemed to be suddenly disintegrating. "Sergey is a good, kind man and he would never allow such a thing. He—"

"Will father a monster. You need to—"

There was a startling humming in her ears like the high whine of electricity along power lines, and a soft, almost comforting blue light filled the room.

She would tell herself for the rest of her life that it was because of the pain in her head, an accident, faithfully repeating this litany even when the nightmares came and refilled her memory with visions of fine white ash and the smell of dried blood and burned bone.

insane. You and Dad are the only people in the world I know I can trust to not only keep my secret but forgive me for the terrible thing I've done. I know, too, that you will love the child I carry – your future grandbaby – no matter what...

She lied about her body's schedule to her doctors and, when she gifted her husband with a healthy boychild seven and a half months into their marriage, she told him the baby was early. She named the child Kamal and when he grew to have eyes the colour of the sea, Helen Atronna-Asanbayev, First Lady of Kazakhstan, just smiled and said he had the same eyes as his Irish grandfather.

"There's more," she says, and her voice is grim and filled with the weight of failure. She hands him another envelope, and as he reads the few short paragraphs, all he wants in the world is to hang his head and cry.

By the time the child was four, his proud father had already begun to teach him the fine art of military strategy. At six his training began in earnest at the finest military academy in Kazakhstan, and at 14 Kamal formally enlisted in the armed forces of his country as the start of his lifelong military career.

Dear Mom:

Sergey told me last night that he knows Kamal is not his child, that he has known this for several years. It seems he was in a riding accident a few months before we were married, and was irreparably injured by it. He didn't want to believe the test results – done in an American clinic where no one in his family would know – because I became pregnant so quickly, but when I failed to conceive again he realized what must have happened. I had to admit that I was pregnant before we consummated the marriage, although I lied and swore that at the time of our marriage I didn't know. And I told him, of course, that my son's true father died long ago. God bless him for saying it doesn't matter – as far as he and the world is concerned, Kamal is now and has always been, his own flesh and blood.

When, in Year Five of the NewWorld Administration, her grown son proudly showed her the new, chrome-plated weapon his scientists had invented and which had been top-secret for the past 18 months, no one understood why the Monarch's mother suffered a sudden heart attack, collapsed, and died.

"We should never have sent Sloan back," he whispers. "God forgive us, but we did it ourselves—
"We were the ones who changed yesterday."

And the rest, as they say, is history.

Yvonne Navarro (born 1957) is an American writer of growing repute, mainly in the horror field. Her debut novel was *AfterAge* (1993), and she also wrote the novelization of the sf movie *Species* (1995). The above is her first contribution to *Interzone*.

Dear Mom:

There is something I must talk about or I'll go

Neal Barrett, Jr. is one of the few writers of sf whose fictions rely at least as much on voice as on plot. And not just the voice of his characters, but the voice of a lost America, of the limitless frontier and its larger-than-life myths: the deadpan deadeye voice of Huckleberry Finn, whose shade is right there on the cover of *Perpetuity Blues and Other Stories* (Golden Gryphon Press, £21.95), which collects a dozen stories together with three extracts from Barrett's great novel of America's yearning for the mythic perfection of its past, *The Hereafter Gang*.

Like Howard Waldrop, the genre's other great celebrant of Americana, Barrett trusts his characters to tell their tales, and the strangeness of these stories grows not through intrusive chunks of explication forced through the rat-run grid of a pulp plot, but by a naturalistic unfolding. These are not stories with the classic genre pattern of tension-complication-resolution, but vignettes (not a few end with ellipses) which slyly reveal larger concerns than those of their characters, greater landscapes than the dusty corners of their settings.

There are landscapes touched by apocalypse: an Earth from which most humans have been removed by mysterious alien invaders in "Class of '61"; an America ravaged by biological warfare and under Chinese rule in "Diner"; a desert America ruled by roving gangs in "Ginny Sweethearts' Flying Circus"; America as a gigantic overpopulated apartment building in the language-bending "Stairs." There's a whole space opera half-glimpsed in the background of "A Day at the Fair." But most prominent is the landscape of America itself, in the finely rendered rural miracle of "Cush," the alternate-history westerns of "Sallie C." and "Winter on the Belle Fourche," and the sweetly melancholic and very funny "Perpetuity Blues," which stirs a time-travelling alien into the story of the triumph of native goodness and grit over wickedness and greed (it's the story of *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* or *It's a Wonderful Life*, but here Jimmy Stewart is a teenage girl) that America has made its own.

In his perceptive introduction, Terry Bisson claims that at least two of the stories in this collection will make the 20th century's short-fiction final cut. He's right too, even though what I consider to be Bar-

Huck Finn's Genre Stew

Paul J. McAuley

rett's best story, "Tony Red Dog," isn't collected here. Barrett, like Howard Waldrop or the late Avram Davidson, is a native genius who just happens to write sf. We're lucky to have him.

Perpetuity Blues is dedicated to the late Jim Turner, who founded Golden Gryphon Press to continue his enterprise, begun in Arkham Press, of publishing short-story collections of the best genre writers. Long may it continue.

The Millennium SF Masterworks edition of Joe Haldeman's classic novel *The Forever War* (Millennium, £6.99) includes restored material in which the battle-weary veterans of an interstellar war return to Earth and try to set up a farm commune. The sequel, *Forever Free* (Gollancz,



REVIEWED

£16.99), starts off like an expansion of that bucolic interlude, and then goes to some very strange places indeed.

The Forever War followed the fortunes of a soldier, William Mandella, caught up in an interstellar war against the Taurans, implacably hostile hive-mind aliens not a little unlike *Starship Troopers*'s Bugs (the resemblance, like the powered suits worn by the soldiers, is deliberate: Haldeman's novel is a knowing demolition of Heinlein's). Each relativistic journey took Mandella farther away from Earth and his own origins in the late 20th century – a good part of the novel's power is the use of interstellar travel both as metaphor for and a sarcastic heightening of the estrangement felt by American soldiers (and Haldeman was one of them) returning from Vietnam.

By the novel's end, Mandella is stranded more than a thousand years in the future; humanity has become Man, a "race of genetically-identical non-individuals, sharing a single consciousness," and has ended the war with the Taurans. Mandella and his buddies opt to take up Man's offer of settling a remote planet, and that's where they are at the beginning of *Forever Free*, fed up with a hard scrabble lab-rat existence under Man's benign rule, with their children growing as alien to them as the Taurans.



This is the US cover as we do not have the UK cover



Led by Mandella, a group of veterans decide to steal back their old starship and take a ten-year loop deep into space that, at relativistic speeds, will bring them back some 4,000 years later, when things might have improved.

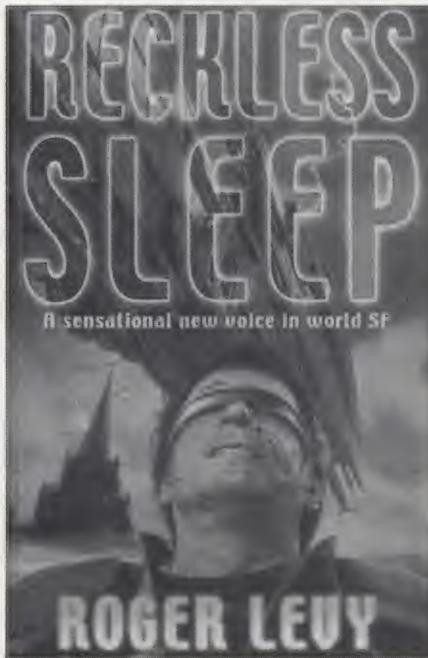
Promising though this kernel is, and the opening scenes (and much that follows) are worked with Halderman's characteristically deft economy, the novel's fatal flaw is that it lacks any central idea, and as a result the plot bangs on about one damn thing after another, starting as a well-written but pedestrian Heinlein-style juvenile and ending as a not very good episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* set in a cheesy cross of Disneyland and Westworld. It proves only that *The Forever War* almost certainly didn't need a sequel; certainly it didn't need this one.



Roger Levy, author of *Reckless Sleep*

There's very little new to be wrung from virtual reality, that frictionless venue in which anything is possible but nothing has any consequence, but Roger Levy's first novel, *Reckless Sleep* (Gollancz, £10.99) does its best. While Levy doesn't plumb the existential twists of, say, Pat Cadigan's later novels, one of his central conceits would have made for a neat *noir* plot if only it had been followed through, and for a little while, before it goes horribly pear-shaped, *Reckless Sleep* does appear to be gestating a genuinely strange sf idea.

The problem is that this novel about the most dangerously protean of sf tropes can't make up its mind what story it should be telling. Is it about the trauma of survivors of a disas-



trous failure to take over an alien planet? Is it a thriller about someone murdering VR gamers with baroque flourishes, set in a near future London riven by seismic shocks and lava-filled rifts? Or is it about aliens exploiting our deepest fears and fantasies?

After an unnecessary prologue concerning a locked-room mystery that as far as I could make out is never resolved, and despite the badly clenched prose and irritating sci-fi neologisms (bLinkers, CrySis, a planet called, for no good reason I could discern, Dirangesep) of the opening chapters, a coherent story does begin to unfold, and to grip. Veterans of the Dirangesep campaign, whose hi-tech remote control fighting machines were

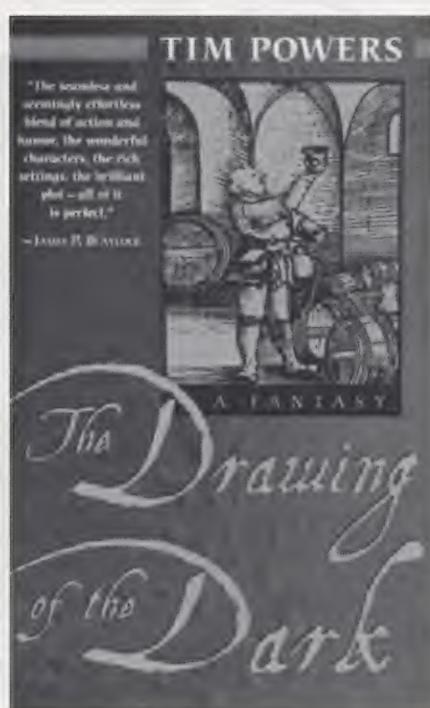
routed by the primitive aliens they were supposed to destroy, are thoroughly traumatized and vehemently despised, but prove useful as test subjects in an impossibly realistic VR game scenario. But why do the tests seem endless, and who is killing off the veterans one by one?

There's a vivid evocation of the VR game and the internal logic which allows gamers to plug in and out of their characters; a nice depiction of London blanketed by volcanic ash and overrun by refugees; an authentically unpleasant stratagem to trap a rapist; wonderfully claustrophobic flashbacks to the rout on Dirangesep; an appropriately depressed but capable hero (Levy shouldn't have quoted his poetry, though). But rather than work through the mechanics of his plot, Levy keeps throwing in more and more new ideas: what could have been a tight little sf thriller ends bloated with half-digested clichés, and the resolution is not only very silly, but comprehensively undermines the novel's rationale. Lovely though the last sentence is, it isn't earned.

Last year, NESFA Press published a collection of Charles Harness's fiction, including his classic short novel *The Rose*. Now, with *Rings* (NESFA Press, \$25), they have brought out an omnibus volume containing three reprints and a brand-new novel. All are tightly plotted and intensely romantic widescreen baroque space operas crammed with the guilty pleasures of the best pulp sf. Which is to say that the characters are economically sketched and endlessly talkative, and the action and invention is colourful and unflagging.

Of the reprints, there's the fast-moving time-travel plot of *The Paradox Men*; a Jacobean revenge plot centred upon a very weird take on steady state cosmology in *The Ring of Ritornel*; and the combination of the legend of Tristan and Isolde and cosmic re-engineering of *Firebird* (where the circular plot hinges on a ring transformed by its voyage across all of space and time).

The new novel, "Drunkard's Endgame," is as ambitious in scope as Harness's earlier work, but more elegiac, embellished with Harness's characteristic motifs of games, rings and renewal. Robots mutiny against their human Overlords, commandeer two spacecraft and flee, but only one spaceship, the *Drunkard*, survives. After a thousand years of evasive travel, the ragged circle of the *Drunkard*'s drunkard's walk has been closed, and it has returned to the Solar System. Earth has been devastated by nuclear war, but the spacecraft's tyrannical and ambitious chief of security fears that some Overlords may survive, and so one of the few original instigators of



the mutiny still alive, L'Ancienne, finds herself at the centre of intrigue, for she and certain of her descendants carry the secrets of a superweapon obtained when she mated with the captain of the long-lost companion ship.

Divided into two warring factions, those who live on the inside and those who live on the outside of the space-craft, both managing to exist in the vacuum and near absolute zero of space, the robots' civilization is authentically strange, and L'Ancienne is one of Harness's most fully-realized characters, a *femme fatale* whose ingenious stratagems are more than a match for her hapless opponents.

As many have remarked, our own Age has much in common with the late Victorian epoch: wars are small and far away; inflation is low; net disposable income is rising; and the gullible are prey to all manner of diet fads, often linked to cod mysticism. It is not therefore surprising that, in fantasy at least, we have rediscovered the delights of the three-volume novel. Moreover, it seems to be evolving along a path that recapitulates that of its progenitor – though somewhat earlier in the 19th century.

If the romanticism of *The Lord of the Rings* echoes that of Sir Walter Scott, then the *haut bourgeois* preoccupations of Robin Hobb's *The Liveship Traders* recall those of Thackeray and George Eliot. I reviewed the first two volumes in *Interzone* 132 and 142, to which I refer those who keep files. For those of you who do not, they're still available, and I propose to repeat myself no more than I must. Now *Ship of Destiny*, the third book, is out from Voyager at £16.99, and if ever the blurb-writer's cliché about "a triumphant conclusion" was justified, it's here.

As I noted previously, though the novel presents a number of love stories, its principal dynamic is the desire of all the human characters to maintain their wealth and social position. Specifically, about half the major threads stem from the determination of great-grandfather Vestrit to propel his family from the second to the first division of the Bingtown Traders, by acquiring a liveship; and to this end he cheerfully mortgaged the future of all his posterity far further than he could envisage. Our own age, no less than the Victorian, often affects a lofty disregard for such motivation, while pursuing it just as zealously. For the less hypocritical this will present no problem, but the book's greatest virtue lies in Hobb's skill in weaving together her numerous major plotlines. These include the struggle of the widowed and impoverished Ronica Vestrit to sustain the liberal traditions of Bingtown against the brutal, slave-owning New Traders and Chalcedeans; the struggle of Serailla to sustain the traditions of

After more than 50 years, Harness still delivers sf that, while it's old-fashioned, is of the purest quill, shorn of pretension and deeply imbued with the play of ideas.

Also noted:

Del Rey's new Impact series delivers a welcome reissue of Tim Powers's *The Drawing of the Dark* (Del Rey/Impact, \$11.95). With this, his third novel, Powers displays what is now his trademark blend of real historical events and a fantasy plot saturated with incident and eccentric characters. Here, the 16th-century seige of Vienna by Turkish forces is trans-

formed into an essential hinge-point in the struggle between the forces of light and darkness. A battered Irish mercenary, Brian Duffy, a reincarnation of King Arthur, is hired to protect a Viennese inn where a magical beer is brewed once each century to renew the Fisher King, whose powers are essential for the preservation of the west. Told with much rough humour and a casually deployed mastery of historical esoterica, *The Drawing of the Dark* is both a picaresque swashbuckler and an intelligent variation on Arthurian myth. Needless to say, it is highly recommended.

Paul J. McAuley



A Triple-Decker

Chris Gilmore

her high position as Companion to the boy Satrap, in the face of the Satrap's own vicious and effete nature; the ill-starred love of Althea Vestrit and Brashen Trell, who long to be together, but who each covet a career as sole captain of a liveship; the perils faced by Malta Vestrit, a flighty young girl who finds herself disfigured and forced to



grow up or go under on a Chalcedean war-galley; the internal conflicts of poor, mad Paragon, torn between the unworthy love which he is congenitally unable to deny, and the true love which may liberate and unify his spirit; the torment of Wintrow Vestrit who, having been rejected by his own father, becomes beguiled by the corrupting father-figure of Kennit, the pirate king, while still half-enthralled by the self-indulgent promise of his false vocation to the priesthood of Sa; the grief with which every liveship must come to terms on discovering its own antecedents; and the hard compromises into which the newly hatched dragon Tintaglia must enter if she is to save her species – despite her own vain and autocratic nature.

Thus, despite the many physical conflicts which take place, the book's overarching theme is the conscious decision to do what is right rather than what is easy, and to Hell with going with the flow! And in the manner of all the best fiction, only those who can make that decision and demonstrate the virtue to keep to it survive – and not in every case, at that; which is a very Victorian outcome.

I'm happy to report, incidentally, that in this last volume Hobb's grammar seems to have improved, though as a writer her ear is still nothing like as good as her eye. We thus get such occasional infelicities as:

"Here he is!" roared a Jamaillian sailor as he leapt up to her. She swung her rung at him. It hit his sword arm, but he simply shifted his arm so the blow was glancing.

This sort of thing would ruin a lesser work, and seriously blemishes this one; someone should pay a decent sub-editor before the definitive edition comes out. Indeed, I hereby offer to sort out the lot, if the publisher cares to send me the discs.

I should also add that the book has certain defects characteristic of the genre. Despite the liveships' obvious long-haul capability, there's no real sense of a world beyond the area of



Ken Lewis's map; it's as if the Earth consisted of the littoral from Newfoundland to Florida Keys plus the Caribbean islands. Likewise, there's no hint as to what catastrophe befell the mighty Elderlings, whose absence permitted the founding of the Rain Wild settlements and the building of the liveships. Generic faults matter less than faults of grammar and style, but a writer of Hobb's other virtues might find them worth addressing.

Frequently, having finished a novel, I've had cause to disparage the writer's moral character and intellectual judgment; but Jan Lars Jensen has notched up some sort of first by provoking that conclusion before I'd read a line of his text. My reason? Here it is, bold as brass, from the copyright page of *Shiva 3000* (Macmillan, £9.99, C-format):

The author respects all religions and does not intend, in this story, to cast any in a negative light.

Taking him at his word, I wish the Lat-terday Saints, the Ugandan Death Cults and even (let's be liberal!) the Scientologists good hunting when they knock on his door. On the other hand... this is a work of fiction. I will pay him the compliment of assuming that sentence to be quite as fictitious as the main text.

In fact, the book is highly imaginative and great fun. Moreover, the self-confidence of the writing leads me to suspect it's rather well researched, though I haven't the background in Hindu mythology to be sure of that. It's set in what purports to be a future India, where the old gods have resumed their sway, and the only traces of the Raj consist of the railway network and the road-transport system, both being fuelled by dung bricks. How you get an internal combustion engine to work that way I shudder to think – perhaps you can't, and it's done by steam; yet though the book is stiff with references to sex and a mythologized vision of mechanical engineering, there's nowhere a single reference to mighty pistons.

The story is told in the first person by Rakesh, a young man who has been touched by a god, and (in knavish exchange) deprived of his wedding night. Yet worse, the god has imposed upon him a dharma (what we westerners call a geas): to seek out and kill the Baboon Warrior. He has also been endowed with preternatural strength, but to a degree that would seem to be less than adequate to such a task, the Baboon being a mighty hero who has literally wrestled with gods and won; moreover, he's an extremely popular figure, and those to whom Rakesh reveals his ambition are as likely to

greet it with rage as with derision.

First, catch your rabbit; since Rakesh must seek out the Baboon, this is marked from the outset as a picaresque novel. The hero of a picaresque tends to acquire companions on the way, and so he does: they include the elderly and deranged veteran of some half-forgotten war, whose clapped-out old rifle has an inexhaustible magazine; a dung-powered incarnation of Jagannath, with the power of enslaving those whom it neglects to destroy; Vasant, a Kshatriya engineer possessed of preternatural empathy with machines; and (most interestingly), the Pragmatics, an heretical Buddhist sect with a preternatural ability to acquire new skills. Pragmatics, being vain, are keen to impress people, so early on Rakesh is treated to a display of archery. The contenders (one heavily pregnant) confront each other and loose their arrows. Does this presage mutual destruction? No way! Such is their skill, and such is their rapport, that the arrows collide mid-field, shivering each other to toothpicks.

The book is lavishly ornamented with such tall stories, among which I particularly relished a dirigible balloon operated by Kama Sutras, and flown, literally, by the seat of the pants. But the underlying conceit, rather perfunctorily exposed in the closing pages, leaves much unexplained. One reads it as science fantasy – but is it fantasy tricked out as science fiction, or science fiction presented from a fantastical viewpoint? I don't propose to answer this one – buy the book and try to second-guess it yourself. Meanwhile, I've a question which I'd genuinely like answered. Anyone who has read Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light* is going to feel a certain uneasiness with this book,

especially the opening chapters. To what extent is one influenced by the other? Is it coincidental that *Shiva* is so steeped in the concept of caste, the only major aspect of Hindu culture that Zelazny conspicuously ignores? Has Jensen actually read Zelazny – and if he has not, could he have written this book thus if he had? I confess, I am wholly bemused – and how often do I confess to that?

Of one thing I'm certain, however: Jensen is far too clever, and with far too developed a sense of humour, to be overly respectful of any religion, let alone all. Jehovah's Witnesses would do well to give his door a miss.

Somewhere in *Journey Beyond Tomorrow*, Robert Sheckley makes a psychological point somewhat (but not exactly) on these lines:

Suppose you wish to explore an enormous and intricate building, and before you set about it, someone presents you with a detailed map of its interior. You very quickly discover that the map is totally useless. It is not merely out of date, or riddled with errors – it's a tissue of deliberate lies. Best throw it away. Yet, you look at it; it's handsomely produced, it's redolent with authority; someone of considerable skill went to considerable effort to produce it. Granted, it bears no obvious relevance to reality, but perhaps, on some deeper level, it has a meaningful relationship therewith. Could you apply sufficient intelligence to a comparison between what it shows and what you can see, you might derive some sort of algorithm, which would render it actually useful. You therefore retain the map, and apply at least as much analysis to its obvious falsehoods as you do to the evidence of your eyes.

When confronted with modernist literature I am frequently reminded of that map. I read the stuff, and it clearly makes no sense; but is it, perhaps, saying something profound (or at least arguable) about the human condition, and doing so in a playful fashion which hopes, by means of metaphor and allegory, to put across its message more forcefully than bald statement could achieve?

The answer, sadly, is most often not. The writer is attempting to conceal his deficiencies of style and content alike by abandoning formal construction and internal logic, in favour of whatever happens to well up from the murky shallows of his unconscious; and never have I encountered a more obvious example than *The Spiritual Meadow* by Yoryis Yatromanolakis (Dedalus, £8.99).

It describes in the first person the start of a young teacher's first posting, to one of the Greek Islands. That the island is totally submerged discom-



modes nobody, though Theodore occasionally notes bubbles collecting on the ceiling. Episodes of extreme violence take place, though everyone ignores them at the time, and they have no lasting effect. The narrative shuttles randomly between the past and historic present tenses, presum-

Dying as he did while still in his mid-forties, Georges Perec (1936-1982) nevertheless had a busy life in words – a tragically short career that was festooned with interesting, sometimes infuriating, work, and some off-kilter, peppery titles, such as (in translation) *Life: A User's Manual*, *Things, W or The Memory of Childhood, A Void...* and *Species of Spaces*.

“Species of Spaces.” It is a title with more than simple phonetic appeal, as indeed is *Espèces d'espaces* (1974), which is in the original French. Under discussion, among other things, were *varieties of nothingness*. Perec, a great gamesplayer, in this book and elsewhere, enjoyed the buzz of contradiction and paradox; of describing the shapes of things not-to-come. And true, these paragraphs are not the place to talk about Georges Perec (not, at least, until a reissue of *W* comes out, or a lost genre gem is located), the idea of emptiness having shape, having form – maybe even its own taste – unravelled in this reviewer’s head a tight clutch of thoughts. It so happened that of the four books hereunder, three dealt with specific penetrations into wastes and voids: into the shifting sands of deserts, the melting frosts, or the muddled permutations and spaghetti-chutes of time-travel. Furthermore, the descriptions of these spaces, in each case, are extremely well done...

Two of the selection were also the second volumes of trilogies, starting with “The Second Book of Outremer” by Chaz Brenchley, *Feast of the King’s Shadow* (Orbit, £7.99). Having this status, this middle ground, is also to be a space, some would say – the space between quest set-off (traditionally) and the resolution; a place, here, for the characters to be between there and there – but that is far too simplistic, in my opinion. Insulting, too. In *Feast of the King’s Shadow* (and in *Longtusk*, discussed below) there is no sense that the author is flagging on the finale. The book is crammed full of description and dreams, death, even humour. And you would expect nothing less of Brenchley; of a man who has consistently kept the standards of the crime/horror genre with which he is most often associated high. Brenchley has a noble turn of phrase, and with this book, the follow-up to *Tower of the King’s Daughter*, he has shown some tough love. The book fairly radiates heat. The 648 pages are, for the most part, so crisp – breathless – with the

ability to demonstrate the writer’s enviable freedom from the shackles of convention. Some of it appears to be addressed to a girlfriend, some is commonplace stream-of-consciousness. My own theory, quite as good as anyone else’s, is that Theodore never got there, but drowned on the way, and

this book represents the alleged process whereby one’s whole life passes before one’s inner eye; on this occasion the aborted future entangled with the watery present and the dead past. “He’d have died of boredom, if he hadn’t drowned.”

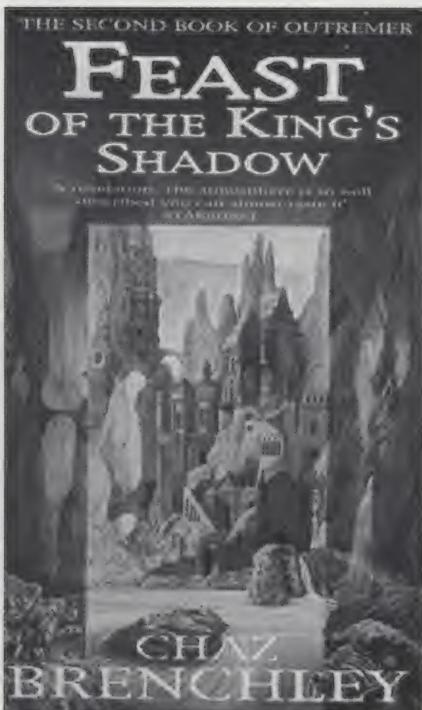
Chris Gilmore

Species of Spaces or “Where Was I Now?”

David Mathew

thwarted and held-in-check emotions of the characters on their travels, that when love is shown (one might say, almost, confessed) it is as though they have reached an oasis – which of course they try to do physically as well.

But where are they going? “Sometimes Julianne thought this whole mis-



sion was... a quest to nothing; it was hard these days to remember the djinni’s warning...” Julianne being the young woman who has run away from a marriage in order to take part in a pilgrimage/struggle that no one seems to understand fully – though Julianne has certain notions, most of them personal. Referring to the djinni’s intervention, she remarks: “It said to me that I must go where I am sent, and marry where I must; and it sends me to Rhabat, though I am married already. It said also that I would find my father there, and that he would be in peril, but that I might save him. Though it might be better if I did not, it said that too.”

What we know is that Brenchley has based his Outremer series on the Crusades; on the distant battles that were fought for holy places. The author is keen to present his views, and those of his sources, and to be true to both sides, we have a picture developing of factional squabbles (and worse) on top of the expected violence, not to mention the more supernatural elements in store. It’s a vivid mix...

So into the mouth of nowhere they go, with Brenchley’s narrative voice getting older, arid, broken (you do not see the author; you see a different man entirely); they are heading for a town in hiding – Rhabat – which is situated by the Dead Waters. One marital abscondee, and her (female) friend who has a very strange almost non-relationship with her father, and who has peculiar affinities with the unreal: “it had often seemed to her as though her thoughts followed that flow of power, out through her fingers and under alien skin...” Oh, and the father is also present, of course – not that the two of them speak to one another. But most fascinating of all is the young boy with a wraith-like intruder in his blood. It might be a blessing or it might be a curse; at times it is one then the other. “You are the Ghost Walker; this is your place of power. That is what you feel. What you carry was created here, given its life and purpose; you have brought it home,” the poor thing is told.

A book of leaps of faith, revelations, portents, it is also a book which makes the reader work. Indeed, Brenchley seems to have operated on the principle that he is only prepared to do 50% of the labour. It is satisfying to find contemporary fantasy as strong, “life-like” and challenging as this. As we trudge through the sand, a few steps behind the camels, and we breathe in

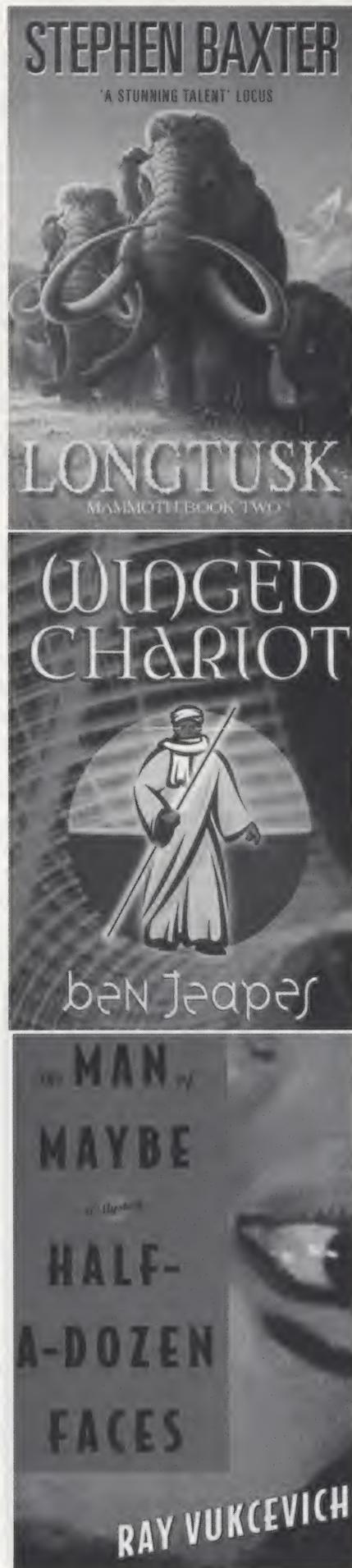


that must and dust, we note the fine writing, the interesting characters, and the crazy paving leading into the land of volume three.

Out of the frying pan, into the fridge – and here's to another fine sequel. We leave the heat and the impossible sweats of a mock-Middle East, and travel north into the frozen air and the deadened smells of snow. Our guide is Stephen Baxter, and our roadmap is *Longtusk*, which is "Mammoth: Book Two" (Gollancz, £9.99), following on from *Silverhair* (out now in paperback – Millennium, £5.99). When I reviewed *Silverhair* for another publication, I was impressed by the author's subtexts, one of which appeared (I thought and still think) to be concerned with the question of perception; of how we perceive. Making a connection between a philosopher, a paranoid and a child, I reiterated a fairly well-known philosophical argument about the perceiver being in control. "The subject needs an object," I said, and then: "What we can't see, or hear, can't hurt us." The idea being, in the first book the reader was forced to accept that in a godforsaken place what we had assumed, in our arrogance (or stupidity, or both), to have died out long ago, still existed.

The Mammoth. "The time is sixteen thousand years before the birth of Christ," Baxter writes on the first page of the sequel. "And every human alive wakes to the calls of the mammoths." Whereas *Silverhair* was a maternal book – a vision of the eponymous female mammoth's destiny to attain, one day, the reverent status of Matriarch, despite her initial feelings on the matter – *Longtusk* seems to be the equivalent of a teenage male. Of course, then, it is obvious that on top of Baxter's other considerable achievements with this series, he has also exacted a rarer form of trilogy-composition. Not unique, but rarer: the focus on one main character per volume, thereby building up a picture of mammoth society through the ages... but also one of human inability to forgive. *Longtusk* has a very strong religious vein running through it; more than might be hinted at by the simple fact that the male, in a strop, goes striding off alone into the wilderness. "Christ," to illustrate the author's point, is mentioned more than once; but I don't want to give away the ending, however beautiful it is.

The mammoth, this particular one, has become the stuff of legend, and Silverhair herself tells of some of his exploits directly to her daughter. The canny way of dealing with she-cats, for example. But much of the novel is written in the third person, in a tone which I praised in the earlier review, and will do so again right here. The



mammoth is captured by us, or our counterparts; every effort is made to ensure that he will comply. Needless to say, he fights the tyranny of men, and is even betrayed by the one he comes to trust. *Longtusk* begins to suspect that never again will he be part of a Family.

As *Silverhair* was, so *Longtusk* is suitable for all the family, although the latter would possibly be a little more difficult to pin down. I wrote, before: "The genius of the book is not in the plot, or in the message, but in the argute voice employed. Put simply, it's the right prose at the right time." I think that sums up volume two as well: the distant coolness, achieved, in part, by the brevity of the paragraphs and the simplicity of the sentences. It is big-hearted, plausible, stately – and recommended.

Ben Jeapes's second novel (not a sequel to *His Majesty's Starship*, although there is a tacky ad for the same at the end of this book under review) is *Winged Chariot* (Scholastic, £6.99), which was also the title of one of the author's stories for *Interzone*. As part of a great month's reading, this volume did not disappoint; nor has Jeapes failed to develop on from the first outing in the long form. *Winged Chariot* is assured and confident; simultaneously it relaxed in tone and nippy in pace. Like *Longtusk* and like *His Majesty's Starship*, *Winged Chariot* is good children's fiction for adults, or good adult fiction for children, depending on the way you look at it. Either way, it's a gentle touch, a fulfilling read.

From a point in the future called the Home Time, the past can be viewed and visited. There's a murder, an investigation, a missing computer, some rogue security; there are genuine concerns for the future – such as the problem of what will happen, "...when the Home Time ends in 27 years time and the World Executive realizes it has twenty billion people to keep happy..." There's a mountain of good plot ideas, and my favourite character – a traveller in time who learns that he does not in fact have to please the whims of those who seem to control him; that there is a life aside from travelling from one location to another, viewing some of the important points in history. There is even some good humour, such as this, which is the one that works best out of context. It's from an early section of the novel, and concerns a fancy-dress party: "...apparently she was a 1920s New York flapper, though what she was meant to flap she wasn't sure and the catalogue hadn't said..."

I look forward to the sequel to *His Majesty's Starship* in due course.

And lastly, but briefly, to this month's real surprise: to a book that would have been a surprise no matter when it had been read; to a book that was like being ambushed – by a man who just said boo, then giggled, then ran away... Across the water – that strange magnetic space – we go, and we are travelling light, and with exhausting dreams. To America we travel, to find a new novel by a new writer called Vukcevich. And as we travel the seas get stormy, the sky turns black. We hold onto each other for support, or cling to the mast. Something... something is approaching. Or we are approaching it, a newfound land that looks familiar at first, but enjoys the swindle-factor of trick-

ing the reader. Sure, it looks like detective fiction; sure, it looks like sf. And sure, it's absolutely hilarious and not at all what you've expected...

The Man of Maybe Half-a-Dozen Faces (St Martin's Minotaur, \$22.95) is by a man named Ray Vukcevich, who might just be a true original. More of a mickey-take even than Charles Bukowski's spoof on detective and horror tropes, *Pulp* (1994), it has a p.i. with serious ontological insecurity – a total of (you guessed it) maybe half a dozen faces, with the personalities and disguises to match... none of which happens to be related directly to anything that might easily be seen as boon to a detective. A Mexican food expert,

for example. Then you have the detective's real persona, and his addiction, not to drink but to tap-dancing clubs. A plot like a bungee jump (but check the rope first), with mad Russians, Internet tomfoolery, and with the 245 pages rinsed through with a perfect fictional relationship with an odd parent, and some excellent jokes, internally logical, one of which I'll leave you with here:

"Because we lived in this universe and not some other universe, the stuff we were looking for, if it existed at all, would be in the last place we looked... Knowing that, Dennis figured it should be possible to fool the universe and save some time." **David Mathew**

In her new novel *Wild Life* (Simon & Schuster, \$24) Molly Gloss, the distinguished author of regional novels (*The Jump Off Creek*) and science fiction (*The Dazzle of Day*) writes of life and death in the Pacific Northwest of the United States in the early years of the 20th century. With unerring concentration she sets before us Charlotte Bridger Drummond, mother of five sons, militant feminist. She works her island farm near the town of Skamokawa on the Columbia River and writes, among other things, dime novels concerning the adventures of an intrepid heroine on the frontier. Charlotte's husband, Wes Drummond, was apparently lost overboard from a river steamer, but she refuses to view a drowned body which turns up months later. Her eccentricity includes being a deserted wife.

When Charlotte looks down from a vantage point she maps for us the towns, the logging camps, the whole of frontier life, river and plain, forest and mountain. The integration of character, action, landscape, is unique and enthralling.

Charlotte is robust and determined – she learned strength from her widowed mother who farmed her own acres and mental alertness from voluminous reading and the company of Suffragists in New York. She is that narrator whom the reader knows better than she knows herself. As she goes careering about on the first bicycle in the district, wearing knicker-bockers and with a cigar between her teeth, we sigh and grin a little uncomfortably. Also when she expresses the view that home appliances will free women and promote their happiness. Well, maybe there are better education opportunities – and bigger and better Women's Houses and rape crisis centres. Charlotte is a compulsive scribbler, notebook and pencil forever in her apron/trouser pocket. Her sons, understandably precocious and clever, have the horrid imaginations of Frontier boys – capture by Indians and encounters with bears are familiar

notions. There are any number of semi-believable tales of huge furry creatures – ape-like? man-like? – lurking in the depths of the forests and any number of forest depths for them to inhabit.

Charlotte, intrepid, properly provisioned and sensibly dressed – daring to criticize the weak sinews of her poor housekeeper Melba – sets off to join a search for Harriet, child of Melba's unfortunate, pregnant daughter Florence, whose no-good husband Homer took the child for a trip to his logging camp, near Yacolt. Communication of every kind is bad on the Columbia – a simple yes or no, dead or alive message, takes days. It is the duty of women to keep vigil, to wait for the word but this tradition is one rejected by Charlotte.

If the frontier town of Skamokawa was a little raw the logging camps in

the hills are plainly terrifying. The huge tree trunks come roaring down the flumes, the channels that transport them, close to a crazy arrangement of catwalks and duckboards where the loggers risk their lives. Charlotte joins the search – the men are polite and helpful, only a poor mad boy steps out of line. But Charlotte has been too bold – she is in for an ordeal which can only be compared to a trip to another world. Like George Amberson, Charlotte gets her comeuppance at last.

The passages which detail the way in which Charlotte becomes lost are almost unbearably poignant, hard yet hypnotic reading, recalling the Christmas when one was trapped between an account of Queen Johanna the Mad and a work by Annie Proulx. Besides hunger, cold, exhaustion, stormy weather, bad luck or bad karma rob her of everything but her unquenchable spirit. When she is utterly forlorn, starved, with bleeding naked feet, she finds that she is sharing the woods with others. They are aware of her presence and she is driven by loneliness to trail after them... These beings are of giant size and covered with thick fine hair.

Even to say so much deprives the reader of the author's exquisite detail and suspense. Maybe the account is spun out a little, but who has written better about mountain, forest, thicket and river, the whole panoply of the Pacific Northwest? Charlotte, scribbling and meditating to the last, becomes at the same time a wild creature, terrified of human hunters.

Her return to the human race is harsh; there is fierce irony in her encounter with the ladies and gentlemen of the Wildwood Club. Her faithful friend, Horace Stuband, brings her home down-river to her boys and the friends who have cared for them. Charlotte's story is not plainly told – she presents it as fiction, part of the enduring legends of frontier life. Yet we know where spiritual treasure can be found – read this one book!

Cherry Wilder



Two Thousand looks to be a good year for sf collections, and Michael Swanwick's *Moon Dogs* (NESFA Press, \$25) is propitious indeed. It's a large, handsomely produced volume, its cover featuring Rick Berry's enigmatic Iron Fawn, and its contents page listing three novellas, a novelette, three short stories, a short play, and sundry provocatively titled articles and speeches. NESFA Press issued this book to mark Michael Swanwick's appearance at Boskone 2000 as Guest of Honour, and it honours him more than adequately.

But peculiarly, this is not the only Swanwick collection due out this year, and not the most important. By Swanwick's own account, he was able to boast at Boskone that four of his collections were appearing in 2000, which occasioned the joke that his murder at the convention would make all authors present suspects, their motive simple jealousy. *Moon Dogs* competes with *Puck Aleshire's Abecademy* (Dragon Press), a chapbook of very short stories, *Tales of Old Earth* (Frog, forthcoming), a definitive selection from Swanwick's stories of the last decade, and *Cigar-Box Faust and Other Miniatures* (Tachyon, forthcoming), which assembles much short short fiction. That *Moon Dogs* is in a real sense a clean-up collection of work that failed to fit in elsewhere, and yet is of such a high standard anyway, is a tribute to Swanwick's consistently great skill at shorter lengths, the intelligent sardonic glitter that is his narrative trademark, the true Swanwick sparkle.

But he had help. Five of the stories in *Moon Dogs* are collaborations with other authors, and in at least four of these cases it was the other who conceived the tale. When Avram Davidson died in 1993, he left various incomplete manuscripts; Swanwick has rounded off two. "Mickelrede" is a novel that Davidson outlined but abandoned, a strange confection about a technologically regressive parallel world whose rulers, besotted with gladiatorial sports, are threatened by Machiavellian Neanderthals periodically in possession of a giant holy slide-rule. Swanwick respectfully and stylishly fills in gaps and adds his comments. "Vergil Magus: King Without Country" is an episode in the career of a great medieval wizard Davidson unfortunately portrayed in only two completed novels; this fragment is narrated in Davidson's best courtly-farcical manner, and Swanwick provides it with an appropriately ironic conclusion.

"Ancestral Voices" and "The City of God" are novellas commenced early in his career by Gardner Dozois, one of the best sf short story writers of the 1970s, in characteristic manner, with

stone relish of the elevation of a couple's marital quarrels to the stage of Celestial warfare.

The original pieces in *Moon Dogs* are no less impressive. The title story is a short parable of how, in a future devastated by diseases rampant after human overuse of antibiotics, the old medical errors find brutal expression in the psychotic behaviour of a reclusive woman. It is complemented by another dreadful warning, the play "The Dead" (which has also appeared as a short story); here, capitalist exploitation of labour, including that of the literally deceased, becomes, even more fully than in Ian McDonald's *Necroville* (1994), a measure of how dead people can become to each other, and to themselves. "Griffin's Egg," a novella originally published as a short book in 1991, is also a story of intense didactic forcefulness: it sums up just how inadequate present human standards of co-operation and understanding are in the face of existing requirements, let alone the demands of transforming novelty. A claustrophobic battle for survival in an industrial Moon colony, one skirmish in a general war raging on Earth, is enough to suggest to those surviving that they must evolve into something better, and they set about this. It is either transcendence, or the general death evoked in the other tales.

Swanwick's non-fiction is amply on display in *Moon Dogs*. There are his short exercises in autobiography; his tribute to Avram Davidson and a Hagiography of Saint Dozois; elegant reflections on the state of sf in the 1990s; a paradoxical take on how life can imitate fiction. But most notable are the twin essays on sf and fantasy previously published in *Asimov's* and in the Tachyon chapbook *The Postmodern Archipelago*. "A User's Guide to the Postmoderns" is a devastatingly accurate and comic account of the Cyberpunk-Humanist Wars of the early-to-mid 1980s, telling of vitriolic pamphlet propaganda, personality clashes, high literary aspiration and eccentricity, and ultimate truce. "In The Tradition" is a milder but still controversial attempt to isolate exactly what can fairly be termed Hard Fantasy; that it's not altogether successful doesn't detract from the joy of reading it. In all these effusions, Swanwick is a sage but sardonic observer, writing with economy and great style.

Moon Dogs (which can be ordered from NESFA Press, PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701, USA, for \$25 plus \$4 overseas postage; alternatively, visit www.nesfa.org) is a generous sampler of the work of one of contemporary sf's greatest short-story writers. It can't be too highly recommended.

Nick Gevers

The Swanwick Sparkle

Nick Gevers

floods of emotional prose, but dropped for want of satisfactory plot direction. Swanwick's role in the alien-predator tale "Ancestral Voices" is subordinate, as Dozois's moody colours prevail; but "The City of God" is a potent demonstration of the virtues of literary collaboration, as Dozois's portrayal of a working man's rebellion against the grinding oppression of his far-future society (Hell) acquires an elegant counterpoint in Swanwick's surreal evocation of a Man-made Heaven. And "Ships," co-written with Jack Dann, is one of the most breathtakingly savage stories in the recent fantasy canon, a delineation with apocalyptic brim-



Any guide to horror fiction that includes contemporary work is welcome. Everett F. Bleiler's *Guide to Supernatural Fiction* cut itself off at 1960, and his critical anthology *Supernatural Fiction Writers*, which was somewhat more up to date, sank almost unremarked. Most books dealing with more recent fiction confine themselves to the likes of King and Herbert, usually because those are all of the field that the commentator has read. David Pringle's *St James Guide to Horror, Ghost and Gothic Writers* is a major exception, of course – I refer the reader to my remarks on it in *Necrofile* 28. Now it is joined by Anthony J. Fonseca and June Michele Pulliam's *Hooked on Horror* (Libraries Unlimited, 1999; available in the UK from Eurospan, 3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8LU, at £52.95).

While the Pringle involves dozens of contributors, *Hooked on Horror* is written by just two. Anthony J. Fonseca is a contributor to *Necrofile*, and like him, June Michele Pulliam lectures on horror fiction. There's no question of their enthusiasm for the field, but I have reservations about the way they've organized the information they provide. Each chapter begins with a summary of its theme and a statement of the theme's appeal, the latter written in a style that suggests Winnie the Pooh as an influence. The bulk of the volume synopsizes horror novels and (much more selectively) films, a listing which is preceded by a chapter on anthologies and one on single-author collections. While it is no longer true that most important work in the genre is confined to the short story, it is certainly a form crucial to the field, and ought to have been more fully covered than *Hooked on Horror* manages. *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural* – a key anthology, still in print from Modern Library, should have been included, but the omissions from the single-author listing border on the inexplicable: Bierce, M.R. James, Machen, Blackwood, W.W. Jacobs (add exclamation marks by all means). Le Fanu is included, but not the two excellent volumes edited by Bleiler for Dover Books, who also have in print by far the best collection of Blackwood. Something ghastly has befallen Le Fanu, whose *Through a Glass Darkly* is listed as including "Forever, Said the Duck" and "Vanilla Dunk." Arkham House is represented by one out-of-print Brian Lumley book, and Aickman only by *Cold Hand in Mine*.

The chapters on novels are on the whole more substantial, and drew my attention to work I didn't know but feel (in some cases) I should. There are omissions, however. The late and highly talented Michael McDowell

receives no mention, though he deserves more than that in chapter 7 ("Ghosts and Haunted Houses"). Chapter 9 ("Vampires and Werewolves") is by far the longest in the book, and seems to me to recommend some work of little merit. It also makes the curious statements that "Dracula never speaks for himself" in Stoker's novel and that in *The Wolf Man* the protagonist "is bitten by a vampire in wolf form" (presumably on the basis that the casting of Lugosi is iconic, not ironic). Chapter 10 ("Demonic Possession" and the like) takes Jonathan Barry to be Whitley Streiber's collaborator rather than evidence of Streiber's skill at wearing a mask. While the chapter recommends my *Ancient Images*, I should have liked the reader to be directed also to try Tim Lucas's *Throat Sprockets* and Theodore Roszak's *Flicker*. Chapter 11 deals with "Mythological Monsters and 'The Old Ones,'" but anyone expecting to find books by Machen and Lovecraft listed there will be as nonplussed as I was, even if both are

named in the introduction to the chapter. Lovecraftian books by Lumley are listed, however. (Lovecraft is scattered through the book: more on this situation later). "Small-Town Horror" includes no Bradbury, who is inadequately represented in the book; so are Fritz Leiber, Jonathan Carroll, Peter Ackroyd. "Maniacs and Sociopaths" omits several important novels; certainly, if Thomas Harris's *Black Sunday* is discussed, there is no basis for excluding Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, Ira Levin's *A Kiss Before Dying*, William Goldman's *Magic*, or any amount of Jim Thompson. "Technohorror" (chapter 15) includes nothing by Peter James. Chapter 17 begins with the questionable statement that "all horror contains elements of both [the psychological and the supernatural]." The chapter on comic horror prompts me to reflect that nothing is more a matter of taste than the sense of humour, perhaps especially where it intersects with horror.

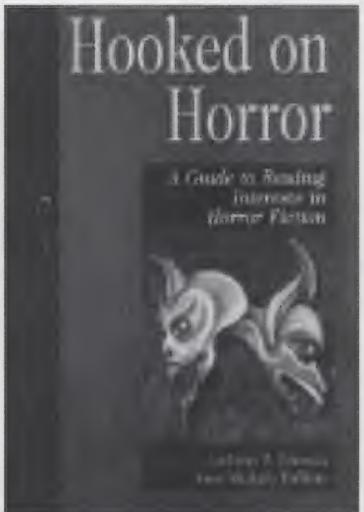
I said earlier that the organization of the book was sometimes shaky. Here are examples. Two books by Lovecraft are listed: one edited by Joyce Carol Oates, which the reader will find under "Collections by Individual Authors," and another annotated by S. T. Joshi, hidden under "History and Criticism" (where *Elegant Nightmares*, Jack Sullivan's book on the classical British ghost story, is described as a "study of horror in general"). That chapter recommends Lin Carter's book on Lovecraft but not Joshi's far superior examination of the man and his work. The oddest chapter, though, is "Telekinesis and Hypnosis," which surely should have dealt with "Psychic Powers." As it stands, it has to export *The Dead Zone* to "Small-Town Horror" and *The Green Mile* to "Maniacs and Psychopaths," while somehow managing to justify including *Firestarter*. Perhaps some of this is evidence of haste, like the way Ellen Datlow is indexed as "Daltow."

Despite all these caveats, however, *Hooked on Horror* is one of the more useful current books of its kind. I would simply advise librarians who use it to keep a copy of this review with it and to be prepared occasionally to bemuse readers whom they advise to try titles listed as similar to others herein. Similarity based on theme has its limits. I should quite like to be present to hear the reactions of admirers of Doris Lessing who are sent off to sample Guy N. Smith.

Ramsey Campbell

Hooked on Horror

Ramsey Campbell





Back in 1984, the first two books in Mervyn Peake's "Titus" trilogy were dramatized for radio by Brian Sibley, whose previous credits include *The Lord of the Rings*. Earlier this year both *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* were re-released to coincide with the BBC TV adaptation.

The most interesting aspect of the production, besides the casting of Sting as Steerpike, is the introduction of Freddie Jones as "The Artist." Narrators in audio sf and fantasy are relatively uncommon – it is more usual to use dialogue to convey setting – but Sibley has created something special here: the Artist is a narrator who is almost a character in his own right, appearing to confer and even to argue with the castle's inhabitants, yet without ever undermining the illusion of reality. All in all it's an atmospheric production, and rather darker than the TV version. The climactic showdown between Titus and Steerpike is particularly memorable, as is the coda. Anyone thinking of creating their own audio fantasy would do well to listen here for inspiration.

Another re-release, this time from 1981, is *Journey Into Space: The Return From Mars*. The original *Journey Into Space* trilogy ran from 1953 to 1956, and featured a different set of actors. As is so often the case with spin-offs and belated sequels, this final 90-minute episode feels a bit superfluous, and lacks the ring of authenticity. Supposedly set 30 years after the events of *The World in Peril*, it sees Jet Morgan and his crew returning to Earth after having been given up for dead. Their tale of an advanced civilization on a dying world makes for enjoyable listening, but covers old ground; it's not helped by the lapses in logic, the massive non-surprise at the end, or the fact that Anthony Hall's Lemmy sounds like a cross between Bluebottle and Frank Spencer. Much more interesting is the accompanying *Journey Into Space... Again*, a half-hour collection of excerpts and anecdotes featuring writer Charles Chilton, Andrew Faulds (the original Jet) and "other parts" actor David Jacobs.

Despite its uneven quality, the entire *Journey Into Space* oeuvre – or at least that which has survived – is very likeable, and very collectable. It would be really nice if someone could re-release the comic strip, and perhaps the scripts of the lost early episodes.

Mervyn Peake: *Titus Groan & Gormenghast* (2 tapes, 3 hours) and *Journey Into Space: The Return From Mars* (2 tapes, 2 hours) are £8.99 each from the BBC Radio Collection

Last year, despite competition from Harry Potter, Seamus Heaney's new translation of *Beowulf* won the Whitbread award. It's been released

scary Saturday tea-time fun, and gives the impression of making more sense than is in fact the case.

It's the turn of Sylvester McCoy's Doctor and companion Ace (Sophie Aldred) in *The Fearmonger*, set in a near-future Britain beset by race riots. Author Jonathan Blum is presumably trying to tell the "grown-up" story here by dealing with relevant and contemporary themes. It's unfortunate then that his efforts are undermined by some very trite ideas, and a tendency to recycle scenes from the series' past. So, we have a creature that feeds on fear (something too hackneyed to work even as metaphor) and a Margaret Thatcher-type character played by Jacqueline "Servelan" Pearce. Nevertheless the play has some very tense moments, is easy to visualize, and makes good use of the medium – having the Doctor appear on a Talk Radio show was a particularly smart move.

Of all the actors who played the Doctor, Colin Baker surely suffered the shoddiest treatment, saddled as he was with bad scripts and at least one dreadful companion. Jacqueline Rayner has redressed the balance on both counts, and if subsequent plays maintain the standards set in *The Marian Conspiracy*, we can safely hail the return of Dr Who to a state of glory, albeit in a different medium. At 55, new companion Evelyn Smythe (played by Maggie Stables) might lack the photogenic qualities of, say, Leela, but on audio she's a triumph. It transpires that an advisor to Queen Elizabeth I has singularly failed to be born; given that he's one of Evelyn's ancestors, her own existence is at risk. Nevertheless, despite the occasional *Back to the Future*-style moments of unbeing, she pretty well takes it in her stride as she accompanies the Doctor to the 16th century to put things right. (Quite why they went wrong in the first place is never explained, nor even discussed for that matter.) Technically a pseudo-historical, *Conspiracy* captures the best qualities of the pure historicals of the early days. By turns it is funny, horrific, exciting and contemplative. More, please!

Doctor Who plays are double CD (£13.99) or double tape (£9.99) comprising four 25-minute episodes, from Big Finish Productions Ltd, PO Box 1127, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 3LN

In the year 2133, prostitute Cindy Rellar (Sammie Winmill) and TV presenter Mydas Mydason (Michael Keating) win a competition they didn't know they'd entered. As a prize, they are flown off to another planet, which is suspiciously convenient for Mydas' much younger wife Maureen (Alison Taffs). Along the way they encounter the villainous Editor (Colin Baker) and his reluctant sidekick Cilla on

Audio Reviews

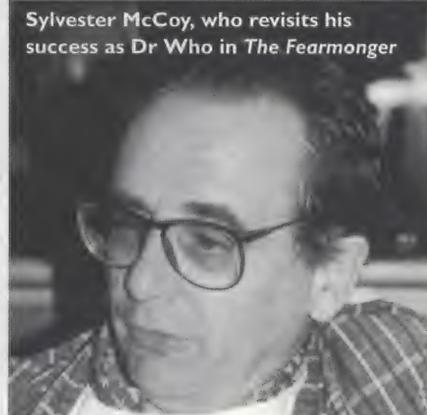
Paul Beardsley

onto tape as a series of "unabridged excerpts" (a somewhat contradictory concept, surely?) read by the poet himself, and previously broadcast on Radio 4. Listening to such a reading should, of course, take one closer to experiencing the poem in the way it was originally intended. Alas, it does not convey the feeling of sitting in a firelit hall drinking ale whilst listening to a bard; in fact the language is stark to the point of being pedantic. It's effective for all that, and anyone interested in the Anglo-Saxon origins of fantasy would do well to check it out. Tolkien fans in particular should not be surprised to discover the inspiration for a scene from *The Hobbit*.

Seamus Heaney: *Beowulf: A New Translation* (2 tapes, 2 hours 15 minutes) is £8.99 from Penguin.

Big Finish Productions have released three new *Doctor Who* plays. "It's Earth again, I'm afraid," says Peter Davison's Doctor in Stephen Cole's *Land of the Dead*, acknowledging how rare it is for the *TARDIS* to visit any other part of the universe these days. Together with companion Nyssa (Sarah Sutton), he is drawn to Alaska to investigate a mysterious energy source that is in some way linked both to an ancient myth and a millionaire's extravagant house. Despite credibility-straining dialogue, and the reiteration of a number of clichés (has anyone in *Doctor Who* ever dug up something long dead that actually stayed dead?) it's good

Sylvester McCoy, who revisits his success as Dr Who in *The Fearmonger*



whom a sex change was performed without her consent – she's played by Norman Lovett. But nothing is quite what it seems...

Given that *Soldiers of Love* is an entirely independent production, featuring a brace of actors from various telefantasy series, and written, directed and produced by an enthusiastic individual (Mark J. Thompson, who also plays several parts), I really wish I could be a bit more enthusiastic about it. Two episodes in, I can report that the production is slick and the story, which continues for another eight episodes, is moderately engaging and quite inventive. Unfortunately the humour is enough to make the *Carry On* team wince. Giggling endlessly about penises and breasts is one thing, but joking about missing breasts is well out of order. On the other hand, each play fea-

tures two original songs (how's that for use of medium?) and although the first one's a bit duff, the others are pretty damned good. Thompson would be well advised to identify where his talents truly lie, and be prepared to farm out some of the writing to a team.

Soldiers Of Love: Story One – Genesis (£8.99, 1 CD, 72 minutes) and *Soldiers of Love: Story Two – Deathtraps* (£9.99, 1 CD, 73 minutes) from MJTV, PO Box 5397, South Woodham Ferrers, Chelmsford CM3 5ED (e-mail: mjtv@ghostlands.demon.co.uk).

Finally, a brief mention of *The Smithsonian Collection*, a pretty comprehensive selection of American Old Time Radio sf on four cassettes or CDs. I've never seen it on sale over here, but *Interzone* contributor Jamie Barras was kind enough to buy me a

It was a strange kind of happenstance. My friend Peter was down for Easter so we could go walking on the Downs together. Because he was here, after our twelve-mile trek over the Seven Sisters, instead of reading my e-mail, we sat down to watch *Mars Attacks!* on television. And although I watched it all the way through, I didn't really enjoy it. It seemed to me that whoever made this film didn't really like all those 1950s movies that were being sent up. It was good enough of its kind, a series of sight gags and the occasional reminder of all those films I loved so long ago, but no characters to actually care about, no one to engage our sympathy, so fairly quickly I consigned the film to the *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* / *There's Something About Mary* bin of instantly forgettable and best forgotten films.

But then, on Sunday, Peter decided to take us to the movies to thank us for our hospitality. Scanning the paper, he said, "there's a preview of *Galaxy Quest*. Let's go to that." Now Peter encouraged us to watch *Mars Attacks!*, so I was wary. "Who's in it?" I asked. "Alan Rickman and Sigourney Weaver." No more caution. Alan Rickman is one of Britain's finest living actors, who has never played a bad part, no, not even *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* or the otherwise unremarkable *Die Hard*. And Sigourney Weaver too has proved to be a fine actress over the years.

Never having heard of this movie before, I went into it almost completely cold, and for a moment was worried that I had made another mistake, as the whole story was set in what was obviously meant to be a *Star Trek* convention with all the actors utterly failed at anything else and bitterly resenting reliving the golden moments of twenty years before – and then the real aliens claimed to be from the Klaatu nebula!

set while holidaying in the United States. Featured shows include *Dimension X*, *The Mysterious Traveller*, *Suspense*, *Escape* and *Arch Oboler's Plays*, all from the 1940s or early 1950s. The plays themselves include adaptations of *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Time Machine*, *War of the Worlds*, *Donovan's Brain* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (the last of which is brutally abbreviated). The quality varies wildly: *The Meteor Man* should have been strangled at birth (though I'm rather glad it wasn't) whereas *Rocket From Manhattan* (broadcast the month they bombed Hiroshima) is very eerie and prophetic.

Worth searching the net for this one; alternatively, perhaps you could persuade your local bookseller to import a few sets?

Paul Beardsley

then asks to be sent home, so is covered in goo, stood outside the spaceship, and zapped home. At this point, I was convinced. The exterior of the spaceship shot is so stunningly wonderful that it is obvious that whoever made this movie loved every minute of it – no one would have spent that much money to make cheap cracks about a genre they despised. I sat back, stopped worrying, and loved every minute of the film.

The secret of great comedy is to have believable characters doing believable things in a mad but utterly believable situation. If you haven't seen *Shakespeare in Love*, go and see it and you will find exactly the same kind of comedy as played out in *Galaxy Quest*: take familiar characters in a familiar setting, add lots of in-jokes for the anoraks (look carefully in the opening sequence of *SiL* and you will see a Souvenir of Stratford mug come briefly into shot) and tell a completely believable story. The story told in *Shakespeare in Love* looks for all the world like a typical Shakespeare play; the story told in *Galaxy Quest* looks like a typical classic *Star Trek* episode; with the extra twist that the actors are caught up in a real situation that looks like a post-modern parody. Director Dean Parisot obviously loves what he is parodying, and I have to admit after a shaky start I loved everything he did. Everyone who loves *Star Trek* will love this film, because it sends up everything they love about it. Everyone who hates *Star Trek* will love this film, because it sends up everything they hate. Only those indifferent to *Star Trek* will not enjoy it, but they're already beyond help. Take someone you care about to see this film and share some helpless laughter. Soon! (Note: this review does not, nor is it intended to, preclude Nick Lowe's review in a later issue.)

Paul Brazier

À La Recherche du Trek Perdu

Paul Brazier

One great problem with any story in the fantastic mode is that before you can introduce any strangeness you have to establish the mundanity of the depicted world. Thus the first 20 minutes of *Mars Attacks!* has a lot of people doing stuff, then the Martians come along, and everything moves to fantasy mode. But the aliens are such vile travesties that the willing suspension of disbelief is kicked out of play, and left there. There can't be a soul out there who doesn't know that in *Galaxy Quest* the actors who play the fictional crew of an *Enterprise*-like starship are co-opted by real aliens to fly a real replica of their cardboard spaceship and sort out vile aliens. So when their intrepid captain, Commander Taggart, is transported in a drunken coma to the real spaceship, he doesn't realise that this is for real (lots of opportunity for dramatic irony here), and pulls (uncannily) exactly the duplicitous stunt on his aliens that the martians do to the Earthmen over and over in *Mars Attacks!* He

BOOKS RECEIVED



MARCH
2000

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Asimov, Isaac. **The Bicentennial Man and Other Stories**. Millennium, 1-85798-932-5, 211pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1976; eleven stories and a poem, with the usual Asimovian interstitial matter, in the form of easy-going autobiographical commentary; this reissue has a movie tie-in cover, with the book's title shortened, presumably as in the film, to *Bicentennial Man*.) 2nd March 2000.

Bacon-Smith, Camille. **Science Fiction Culture**. "Feminist Cultural Studies, the Media, and Political Culture Series." University of Pennsylvania Press, ISBN 0-8122-1530-3, 319pp, trade paperback, \$24.95 (£18.50 in UK). (Critical study of science-fiction fandom, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; distributed in the UK by Plymbridge Distributors, Estover Rd., Plymouth PL6 7PZ; this looks to be a very interesting and readable academic study; it defines its subject broadly, dealing not only with "traditional" sf conventions and fanzine fandom, but with media fans, the internet and other fannish phenomena surrounding the fields of sf and fantasy; the author's personal background is probably in *Star Trek* fandom, as indicated by the title of her earlier book [not seen by us],

Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth [1992], but she covers a much wider area here.) Late entry: February publication, received in March 2000.

Baker, Kage. **Sky Coyote**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-73180-0, 292pp, A-format paperback, cover by Tom Canty, \$5.99. (Sf novel; first published in the USA, 1999; the author's second novel, and like her first it involves time-travel.) 7th March 2000.

Benford, Gregory. **The Martian Race**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-999-7, 472pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1999; a late contribution by physicist Benford to the 1990s vogue for realistic, near-future novels about the colonization of Mars.) 6th April 2000.

Benford, Gregory. **Timescape**. "SF Masterworks, 27." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-935-X, 412pp, B-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1980; one of the best, and subtlest, time-travel stories.) 9th March 2000.

Brosnan, John. **Scream: The Unofficial Guide to the Scream Trilogy**. Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-7162-8, 144pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Illustrated guide to the trio of horror films directed by Wes Craven; first edition; perhaps its main point of interest is that it's written by the veteran Australian-born sf writer and critic [and erstwhile Interzone contributor] who previously brought us such movie-related books as *James Bond in the Cinema* [1972], *The Horror People* [1976] and *The Primal Screen: A History of Science Fiction Film* [1991].) 28th April 2000.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. **At the Earth's Core**. Illustrated by J. Allen St John. Introduction by Gregory Benford. Afterword by Phillip R. Burger. "Bison Frontiers of Imagination." Bison Books [University of Nebraska Press, PO Box 880484, Lincoln, NE 68588-0484, USA], ISBN 0-8032-6174-8, xi+296pp, trade paperback, cover by St John, £8.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1922; this is the American edition of March 2000 with a UK price and publication date added; distributed in the UK by Combined Academic Publishers Ltd, 41 Bayston Rd, London N16 7LU; it's a facsimile of the first edition, with the original [very evocative] book illustrations; first serialized in *All-Story Weekly*, 4th-25th April 1914, this is one of the minor pulp-magazine classics of pre-Gernsbackian sf [more exactly, "scientific romance"]; Burger's afterword is particularly well-informed, and interesting; these attractively-produced Bison Books reprints of early sf are building into a collectable series, complementing the Millennium "SF Masterworks" and other recent reprint series by making available older material [see also under Jack London, below].) May 2000.

Butler, Octavia E. **Parable of the Talents**. Women's Press, ISBN 0-7043-4645-1,

365pp, C-format paperback, cover by Aude Van Ryn, £9.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1998; sequel to *Parable of the Sower* [1993]; it's good to see that Women's Press are still publishing the occasional sf title – if rather late in the day, in this case; like its predecessor, this is "feminist sf" and "black sf," but it could also be viewed, more fruitfully perhaps, as a major example of "California sf" – in the tradition of George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides*, Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*, and the two trilogies by Kim Stanley Robinson.) 27th April 2000.

Calder, Richard. **Malignos**. Earthlight, ISBN 0-671-03720-X, 359pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £6.99. (Sf novel first edition; Calder's seventh novel; the opening part first appeared as a separate novella, also called "Malignos," in *Interzone* 144 [June 1999]; recommended.) 3rd April 2000.

Clute, John, and Candas Jane Dorsey, eds. **Tesseracts 8: New Canadian Speculative Writing**. Tesseract Books [214-21 10405 Jasper Ave., Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3S2, Canada], ISBN 1-895836-62-X, vii+312pp, hardcover, cover by Mitchell Stuart, Canadian \$23.95. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; there is a simultaneous paperback edition [not seen]; this is the latest in a long-running series of anthologies edited by various hands; it contains all-new stories and a few poems by A. M. Dellamonica, Cory Doctorow, Sally McBride, Yves Meynard, Ursula Pflug, Karl Schroeder, Daniel Sernine, Jean-Louis Trudel and many others; a number of stories are translated from French.) Late entry: 1999 publication, received in March 2000.

Costikyan, Greg. **First Contract**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-87396-4, 287pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it appears to be humorous – involving alien invasion and big business.) July 2000.

Croker, B. M. **"Number Ninety" and Other Ghost Stories**. "Richard Dalby's Mistresses of the Macabre, Volume Three." Edited by Richard Dalby. Illustrated by Paul Lowe. Sarob Press ["Brynderwen," 41 Forest View, Mountain Ash, Wales CF45 3DU], ISBN 1-902309-08-1, xvi+152pp, hardcover, cover by Lowe, £21. (Horror collection, first edition; limited to 250 numbered copies; 15 ghost stories by an Irish-born late-Victorian author, most of them long unavailable; Bithia Mary Croker [1849-1920] was best-known for her novels of India, and many of these tales are set in that country; they first appeared in such British magazines as *London Society* and *Chapman's Magazine of Fiction*, from the 1880s to the 1900s; like earlier Dalby-edited Sarob Press publications, this nicely-produced volume is highly recommended to those of an antiquarian bent.) March 2000.

Crowther, Peter, ed. **Foursight**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-57506-870-1, viii+216pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror omnibus, first edition; the

interzone



four novellas it gathers – *Leningrad Nights* by Graham Joyce, *How the Other Half Lives* by James Lovegrove, *Andy Warhol's Dracula* by Kim Newman and *The Vaccinator* by Michael Marshall Smith – were first published as slim volumes by the small press PS Publishing in 1999; this edition drops the original introductions [by Peter Straub, Colin Greenland, F. Paul Wilson and M. John Harrison] and adds a new one by the editor, Peter Crowther.) 23rd March 2000.

Crowther, Peter, ed. *Taps and Sighs*.

Introduction by Douglas E. Winter. Afterword by Richard Matheson. Subterranean Press [PO Box 190106, Burton, MI 48519, USA], ISBN 1-892284-74-X, 255pp, hardcover, cover by J. K. Potter, \$35. (Horror/ghost-story anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains all-new stories by a strong line-up of names – Chaz Brenchley, Poppy Z. Brite, Ramsey Campbell, Charles de Lint, Ed Gorman, Graham Joyce, Terry Lamsley, Ian McDonald, Richard Christian Matheson [not the author of the afterword, but his son], Thomas F. Monteleone, Michael Marshall Smith, Brian Stableford, Ken Wisman, Gene Wolfe and a few others.) 15th June 2000.

Datlow, Ellen, ed. *Vanishing Acts: A Science Fiction Anthology*. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86962-2, 381pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains mainly new stories on the timely theme of endangered species, by M. Shayne Bell, Michael Cadnum, Ted Chiang, Joe Haldeman, Paul J. McAuley, David J. Schow, Brian Stableford and others – plus a few reprints, by Suzy McKee Charnas, Avram Davidson, Karen Joy Fowler and Bruce McAllister; it looks to be good.) June 2000.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. *Black Heart, Ivory Bones*. Avon, ISBN 0-380-78623-0, x+368pp, trade paperback, cover by Thomas Canty, \$13.50. (Fairy-tale/fantasy anthology, first edition; sixth [and probably the last] in the series of dark-hued "fairy tales for adults" which began with *Snow White, Blood Red* [1993]; it contains all-new stories by Scott Bradfield, Michael Cadnum, Susanna Clarke, Charles de Lint, Esther Friesner, Neil Gaiman, Tanith Lee, Joyce Carol Oates, Severna Park, Delia Sherman, Brian Stableford, Howard Waldrop, Jane Yolen and others; recommended.) 7th March 2000.

Dunsany, Lord. *Time and the Gods*. "Fantasy Masterworks, 2." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-989-9, viii+584pp, B-format paperback, cover by J. W. Waterhouse, £6.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition in this form; the six constituent short-story collections, *Time and the Gods*, *The Sword of Welleran*, *A Dreamer's Tales*, *The Book of Wonder*, *The Last Book of Wonder* and *The Gods of Pegana* [this last title actually the first, but printed out of chronological order at the rear of the volume], were originally published as separate slim books in the UK,

June 2000

1905-1916; this must be the first time that Dunsany [Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th Baron Dunsany, 1878-1957] has been in print in a British paperback edition in decades [if ever?]; a most welcome volume, and a fine cornerstone for this new series, "Fantasy Masterworks," which promises to do the same for the fantasy field as the "SF Masterworks" series has done for science fiction; see also under Gene Wolfe, below.) 23rd March 2000.

Eddings, David and Leigh. *The Redemption of Althalus*.

"A new single-volume epic." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224754-2, 771pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; the biggest of Big Commercial Fantasies, with a major marketing campaign planned – including advertising in magazines like *GQ*, *Marie Claire* and *Prima*.) 3rd July 2000.

Egginton, Bob. *Greetings from Earth: The Art of Bob Eggleton*.

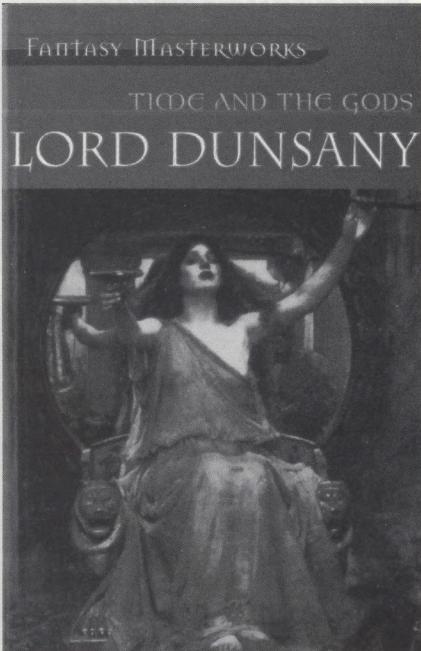
Text by Nigel Suckling. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-662-X, 112pp, large-format paperback, cover by Eggleton, £14.99. (Sf/fantasy art portfolio; first edition; a new gathering of book covers and other artwork by the popular multi-Hugo Award-winning American artist; for those that like colourful and imaginative art, recommended.) 23rd March 2000.

Feintuch, David. *Patriarch's Hope*.

"The epic Seafort Saga is back." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-961-X, 488pp, A-format paperback, cover by Stephen Youll, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1999; sixth in the series; "Hornblower-in-space" adventure stories seem almost to have become an Orbit Books speciality [see also under Elizabeth Moon, below].) 6th April 2000.

Gardner, James Alan. *Hunted*.

Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-80209-0, 421pp, A-format paper-



back, \$6.99. (Sf novel; first edition; proof copy received; the author's fourth novel, it's space-adventure stuff, and comes with cover commendations from David Feintuch and Robert J. Sawyer.) 5th July 2000.

Hanley, Victoria. *The Seer and the Sword*. Scholastic Press, ISBN 0-439-01282-1, 382pp, hardcover, cover by Ian Miller, £14.99. (Young-adult fantasy novel, first edition [?]; blurb as "an epic fantasy of extraordinary scope," this is a debut book by a writer who may be British [but we're not told].) 21st April 2000.

Harrison, Harry. *Stars and Stripes in Peril: Stars and Stripes Trilogy, Volume Two*. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-68919-6, 330pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Stone, £16.99. (Alternative-world sf novel, first edition; second in a trilogy about a 19th-century war-which-never-happened between Britain and the USA.) 6th April 2000.

Hartwell, David G., and Glenn Grant, eds. *Northern Suns*. "The New Anthology of Canadian Science Fiction." Tor, ISBN 0-312-86462-0, 382pp, trade paperback, \$15.95. (Sf anthology, first published in 1999; a follow-up to *Northern Stars* [1994], it contains reprint stories by Canadian-born or Canadian-resident authors, including Margaret Atwood, Alain Bergeron, Eric Choi, Cory Doctorow, the late Robertson Davies, Nalo Hopkinson, Jan Lars Jensen, Nancy Kilpatrick, W. P. Kinsella, Scott Mackay, Derry Murphy, Ursula Pflug and Karl Schroeder, among others [the line-up is completely different from that of the previous anthology, no doubt to prove the point that Canada has plenty of sf and fantasy writers]; one piece, Geoff Ryman's "Fan," first appeared in *Interzone*; a few of the stories are translated from the French language; there is also a reprinted essay by John Clute, and notes and appendices by the editors; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 146.) 5th April 2000.

Herbert, Brian, and Kevin J. Anderson. *Prelude to Dune: House Atreides*. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-75176-2, viii+604pp, A-format paperback, cover by Gerry Grace, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1999; opening volume of a prequel trilogy to the late Frank Herbert's *Dune* [1965], which book is described as "the best-selling science-fiction novel of all time... over 17 million copies are in print in 20 languages"; Brian Herbert is the original author's son; presumably he has called upon jack-of-all-trades Kevin J. Anderson to do most of the writing here.) 20th April 2000.

Hewson, David. *Native Rites*. Harper-Collins, ISBN 0-00-651358-1, 444pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror thriller, first edition; marketed for the mainstream, it appears to be this British journalist's fourth novel.) 17th April 2000.



Howarth, Chris, and Steve Lyons. **Red Dwarf Programme Guide.** "Third revised edition." Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0402-2, viii+353pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Episode guide to the BBC TV sitcom *Red Dwarf*; when the publishers call it the "third revised edition," they actually mean it's the fourth edition, previous ones having appeared in 1993, 1995 and 1997; this one has been updated to incorporate details of the programme's eighth series, shown in 1999; illustrated with 16 pages of black-and-white photographs, it's well packed with information, as Virgin Publishing's neat little TV programme guides usually are; let's hear it for the good old modest A-format paperback! – there should be more of the around, as opposed to those over-sized, over-priced things that so many other publishers produce, especially in the area of media tie-ins.) *April 2000*.

James, Peter. **Faith.** Orion, ISBN 0-75282-547-X, 339pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen], priced at £16.99; it seems to be the Peter James package as before, aimed at a mainstream thriller readership.) *20th April 2000*.

Kress, Nancy. **Probability Moon.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87406-5, 334pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; an interplanetary story which the accompanying publicity letter describes as "sf adventure for grown-ups.") *July 2000*.

Leiber, Fritz. **The Big Time.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-89079-6, 128pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1961; winner of the Hugo Award for best novel [on its first publication in *Galaxy* magazine in 1958].) *5th April 2000*.

London, Jack. **Before Adam.** Illustrated by Charles Livingston Bull. Introduction by Dennis L. McKiernan. Epilogue by Loren Eiseley. "Bison Frontiers of Imagination." Bison Books [University of Nebraska Press, PO Box 880484, Lincoln, NE 68588-0484, USA], ISBN 0-8032-7993-0, xiii+266pp, trade paperback, cover by Bull, £8. (Prehistoric sf novel, first published in the USA, 1907; this is the American edition of March 2000 with a UK price and publication date added; distributed in the UK by Combined Academic Publishers Ltd, 41 Bayston Rd., London N16 7LU; it's a facsimile of the first edition, by the looks of it, with the original book illustrations; the late Loren Eiseley's interesting afterword dates from an earlier reprint of 1962; one of the minor classics of prehistoric romance, this short novel was first serialized in *Everybody's Magazine*, October 1906–February 1907 [which means the first episode coincided with the last episode of the same author's famous *White Fang* (in *The Outing Magazine*, October 1906) – they were busy people, those Edwardian-era fiction-magazinists].) *May 2000*.

McAuley, Paul J. **Making History.** Introduction by Michael Swanwick. PS Publishing [98 High Ash Drive, Leeds LS17 8RE], ISBN 1-902880-08-0, 74pp, trade paperback, cover by David A. Hardy, £8. (Sf novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at £25 [not seen]; this is the first of a second quartet of novellas from PS Publishing, all of which, we are promised, will be sf rather than horror or dark fantasy – see under Peter Crowther, above, for the reprint of PS's first foursome [as *Foursight*.]) *March 2000*.

McCaffrey, Anne. **Pegasus in Space.** "The final volume in the magnificent Pegasus Series." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04327-8, 427pp, hardcover, cover by Paul Young, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition [?]; third and last in the "Pegasus" series, following *To Ride Pegasus* and *Pegasus in Flight*.) *20th April 2000*.

Mallory, James. **Merlin: The End of Magic.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-651291-7, 287pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Arthurian fantasy TV mini-series novelization, first published in the USA, 1999; copyrighted "Hallmark Entertainment Inc.," and the third of a trilogy, it's based on the script by David Stevens and Peter Barnes ["story by Edward Khmara"] for the mini-series [American TV-speak for "serial"] directed by Steve Barron, starring New Zealander Sam Neill as Merlin; the author appears to be American – and in this context, "Mallory" smells of pseudonym.) *17th April 2000*.

Meaney, John. **Paradox.** Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04573-4, 408pp, hardcover, cover by Jim Burns, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the second novel by a British writer whose short stories have appeared in *Interzone*; it's com-

mended on the cover by Stephen Baxter and others.) *8th June 2000*.

Modesitt, L. E., Jr. **Mag'i of Cyador.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87226-7, 444pp, hardcover, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, \$27.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the tenth "Recluse" novel; the quite engaging author note in the accompanying publicity letter tells us that, in addition to 25 novels, "Mr Modesitt has published technical studies and articles [generally with boring titles], columns, poetry, and a number of science fiction stories"; he has a reputation for being at the hard-edged, scientifically-minded end of the Big Commercial Fantasy field [if that field can be said to have such an "edge"] – nevertheless, we are told the *Romantic Times* gave his previous novel in this series four stars of approval.) *8th April 2000*.

Moon, Elizabeth. **Rules of Engagement: Book Five of The Serrano Legacy.**

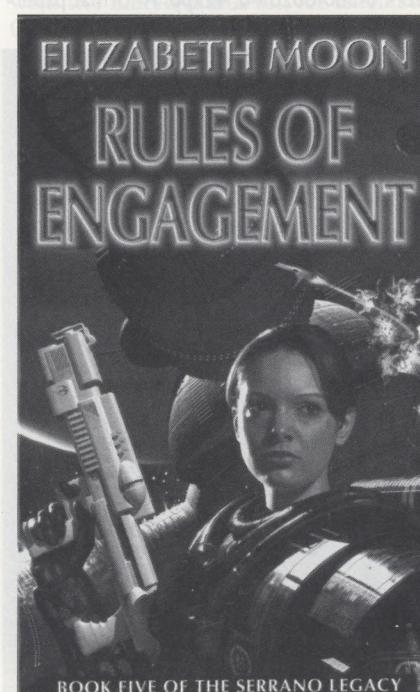
Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-964-4, viii+500pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1998; more military space operatics from this author who is a former U.S. marine; a sixth volume will follow.) *6th April 2000*.

Parker, K. J. **The Proof House: Volume Three of the Fencer Trilogy.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-966-0, 499pp, C-format paperback, cover by Mick Van Houten, £10.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; "the spellbinding epic fantasy of war, intrigue and magic reaches its triumphant conclusion.") *6th April 2000*.

Price, Susan. **The Sterkarm Handshake.** Scholastic/Point, ISBN 0-439-01408-5, 565pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Edwards, £5.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in 1998; Susan Price [born 1955] is a British children's writer of distinction [winner of the 1987 Carnegie Medal for *The Ghost Drum*]; this book concerns time travel between a polluted 21st century and the 16th-century border country of England and Scotland, and it won the *Guardian Children's Fiction Award* for 1998; three of Price's earlier novels, all fantasies, are reissued as Point paperbacks along with this one – *Foiling the Dragon* [1994], *Elfgift* [1995] and *Elfking* [1996], each priced at £4.99.) *21st April 2000*.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **The Martians.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-649702-0, 457pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Elson, £6.99. (Sf collection, first published in the UK, 1999; it consists of several novellas and short stories, all set on the Red Planet, plus various background fillers and unpublished out-takes [including poems] from the author's now-classic Mars trilogy, *Red Mars* [1992], *Green Mars* [1993] and *Blue Mars* [1995]; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 144.) *3rd April 2000*.

Scott, Melissa. **The Jazz.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86802-2, 316pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf



novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's described as "a hip novel of the media-dominated future.") June 2000.

Silverberg, Robert, ed. **Legends**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648393-3, xiv+380pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1998; this is the second half of the original hardcover anthology – the first half, also titled simply *Legends*, was released in a mass-market edition in November 1999; it contains all-original stories, each set in its creator's best-known world, by Orson Scott Card, Raymond E. Feist, Terry Goodkind, Ursula K. Le Guin, Stephen King, and editor Silverberg himself; the whole was reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 139.) 3rd April 2000.

Stapledon, Olaf. **Last and First Men**. Foreword by Gregory Benford. Afterword by Doris Lessing. "SF Masterworks, 11." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-806-X, xx+307pp, B-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1930; for all its datedness [particularly in the early chapters], an indispensable addition to the Millennium series of classic sf; unfortunately we were not sent this [nor the following item, by Stewart] at the time of publication last year – however, review copies have now mysteriously turned up, and they're such important books it seems worth listing them now; this particular edition of *Last and First Men*, with its brief but interesting added matter by Benford and Lessing, appears to be photo-reproduced from some American edition of 1988, which we never saw.) Late entry: June [?] 1999 publication, received in March 2000.

Stewart, George R. **Earth Abides**. "SF Masterworks, 12." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-821-3, 312pp, B-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1949; such a wonderful book: this editor's favourite of all American sf novels – what more to say?; well, only to remark that George Ripley Stewart [1895-1980] would probably be a forgotten author by now were it not for the sf community keeping this particular work of his alive; long may it continue to be reprinted and read.) Late entry: June [?] 1999 publication, received in March 2000.

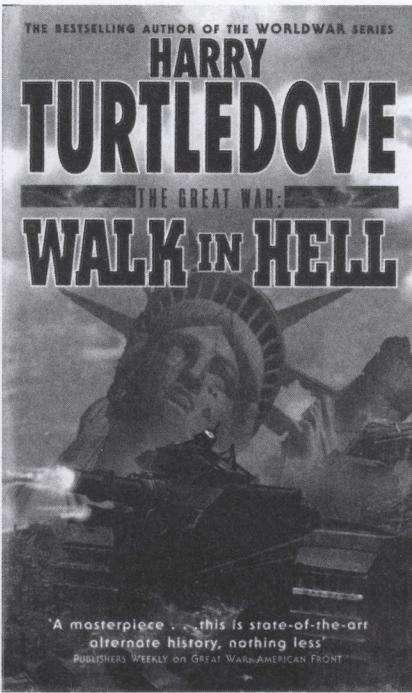
Swanwick, Michael. **Moon Dogs**. Edited by Ann A. Broomhead and Timothy P. Szczesuil. Introduction by Gardner Dozois. NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701-0809, USA], ISBN 1-886788-22-1, 409pp, hardcover, cover by Rick Berry, \$25. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous signed, slipcased, limited edition [not seen], priced at \$36; it contains seven stories, half a dozen essays and sundry other matter; several of the stories are collaborations – with Jack Dann, Avram Davidson and Gardner Dozois; reviewed by Nick Gevers in this issue of *Interzone*.) April 2000.

June 2000

Tepper, Sheri S. **Singer from the Sea**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79199-4, 512pp, A-format paperback, \$6.99. (Sf novel; first published in the USA, 1999; it's in the author's favoured planetary-romance vein – an sf mode that she utilizes more effectively than just about anyone else now writing; reviewed by Tom Arden in *Interzone* 148.) 7th March 2000.

Tiptree, James, Jr. **Meet Me at Infinity**. Edited by Jeffrey D. Smith. "The Uncollected Tiptree: Fiction and Nonfiction." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85874-4, 396pp, hardcover, cover by John Harris, \$25.95. (Sf/mainstream/non-fiction collection, first edition; "James Tiptree, Jr" was, of course, the sf-writing pseudonym of Alice Bradley Sheldon [1915-1987]; this book brings together all her uncollected writings – stories, early and late, non-fiction snippets, interviews, etc; among the interesting items included is her very first published story, "The Lucky Ones," about refugees in post-war Germany – it appeared in *The New Yorker*, 16th November 1946, under the byline Alice Bradley; yes, "Tiptree" made her debut in *The New Yorker*! [and never appeared there again, so far as we know]; this volume is a worthy project for an important writer.) Late entry: 9th February publication, received in March 2000.

Turtledove, Harry. **The Great War: Walk in Hell**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-71548-0, 694pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Stone, £6.99. (Alternate-history sf novel, first published in the USA, 1999; sequel to *The Great War: American Front* [1998] in an ongoing tetralogy about a First World War which went differently from the one in our timeline.) 20th April 2000.



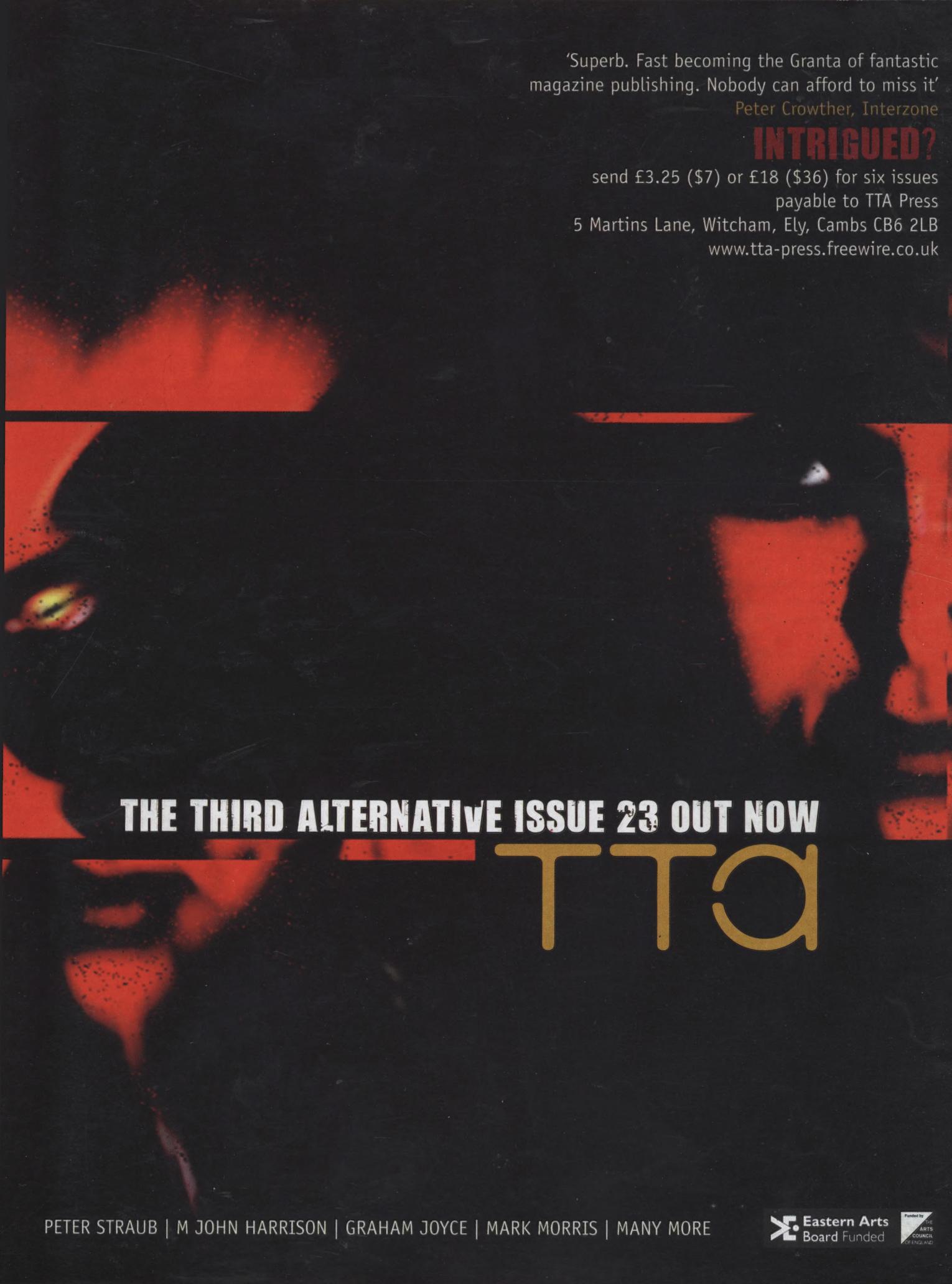
Vinge, Vernor. **Across Realtime**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-147-2, 533pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Sf omnibus, first published in this form in the UK, 1993; the two linked novels it contains, *The Peace War* and *Marooned in Realtime*, were originally published separately in the USA, 1984 and 1986.) 9th March 2000.

Vinge, Vernor. **A Fire Upon the Deep**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-127-8, 579pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; co-winner of the Hugo Award as the best sf novel of its year; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 58.) 9th March 2000.

Walotsky, Ron. **Inner Visions: The Art of Ron Walotsky**. Foreword by Joe Haldean. Afterword by Alan Dean Foster. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-774-X, 112pp, large-format paperback, cover by Walotsky, £14.99. (Sf/fantasy art portfolio; first edition; a gathering of book covers and other artwork by the well-regarded American artist; this is his first book; in addition to text by Walotsky himself, it contains appreciations by Jim Burns, Vincent Di Fate, Bob Eggleton, Ed Ferman, Don Maitz, Gordon Van Gelder, Robert Weinberg and others; one unusual but useful feature – and it may set the standard for future artists' portfolios – is that it contains, in small print on the last two pages, a complete "bibliography" of all book and magazine covers by Walotsky, from 1967 to 1999; recommended.) 20th April 2000.

Wolfe, Gene. **The Book of the New Sun, Volume 1: Shadow and Claw**. "Fantasy Masterworks, 1." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-977-5, 603pp, B-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £7.99. (Sf/fantasy omnibus, first published in this form in the USA, 1994; the two constituent novels, *The Shadow of the Torturer* and *The Claw of the Conciliator*, were originally published separately in the USA, 1980 and 1981; this is assuredly a masterpiece, but is it fantasy rather than sf? – a cross between the two is probably the correct answer: a fantasy in feel, but with an sf underpinning; whatever, it's highly recommended.) 23rd March 2000.

Wolfe, Gene. **In Green's Jungles: Volume Two of The Book of the Short Sun**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-87315-8, 384pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; second part of a trilogy which is itself a follow-up to the tetralogy "The Book of the Long Sun" [1993-1996]; the first part, *On Blue's Waters*, was published in October 1999 and reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 151; the third part, *Return to the Whorl*, is scheduled for later in 2000.) August 2000.



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